THE PREACHER AND THE MODERN MIND

G. JACKSON
B.A.

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The 42nd Fernley Lecture

THE PREACHER
AND
THE MODERN MIND

BY THE
REV. GEORGE JACKSON, B.A.

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TO

HENRY HAIGH,

MISSIONARY, PREACHER, AND STUDENT

IN WHOM
THE ROYALTY OF TRUTH
HAS ALWAYS BEEN MET BY
THE LOYALTY OF OBEDIENCE

WITH A YOUNGER COMRADE'S AFFECTIONATE REGARD

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PREFACE

MAY I hold the reader by the button-hole for a moment while I explain to him what to look for and what not to look for in the pages that follow? I am especially desirous that a somewhat pretentious title should not awaken expectations that cannot be fulfilled.

First of all, then, these chapters are concerned with the preacher, and with the preacher as preacher, not as scholar or philosopher. It was the purpose of the Founder of this Lecture, as indicated in the Trust Deed executed by him, that it should be delivered 'with special reference and adaptation to the necessities of the times, and with a view to the benefit of the Candidates who are about to be ordained by the Conference to the Ministry.' This two-fold instruction I have endeavoured to keep steadfastly in view throughout these pages; they are addressed to the preacher, and especially to the young preacher, who feels, and is himself seeking to minister to, 'the necessities of the times.'

Nevertheless, I am sadly conscious how inadequately the book makes good the promise of its title. To speak in homely phrase, the sign is too big for the shop. Some subjects which might fairly claim a place in any discussion of the preacher's relation to the modern mind have been omitted, or touched on only incidentally, through lack of

space; others, because I did not feel myself competent to deal with them. And even within the limits which I have laid down, it may be that to the expert—if his eye should chance to fall on these pages—I shall appear (as a recent Bampton Lecturer puts it) to speak as a layman, and occasionally as a fool. To all of which all that needs to be said is this: that with the expert I am not concerned, except to make such use of him as I may be able; that the title, over-ambitious as it is, is the best for my purpose I could hit on; and that for the rest, if I have been able, on one or two aspects of my great theme, to write what is true and timely and helpful, I have accomplished to the full all that I proposed to myself in undertaking this task. Every author knows, unless he has suffered his vanity to put out the eyes of his understanding, that to the vast majority of the great reading public he has nothing whatever to say. His world is not their world, neither are his thoughts their thoughts. 'What do you in England,' an American once asked Thackeray, 'think of Martin Tupper's works?' 'In England,' was the reply, 'we do not think of Mr. Tupper at all.' What, then, must it be with those of us who would be thankful to know we had one reader where Tupper had his thousands? And yet we go on with our work, happy and content if we have been able to detach an interested few from the vast heedless throng. That some can be made to listen, and not only to listen, but really to care for the things for which we care, is guerdon sufficient. And when they tell us that our way of putting things does really help them, we are too thankful even to think of the multitudes who never come

within earshot of us, and do not even know that we are talking.

Of the many to whom I am debtor sufficient acknowledgement has been made in the lecture itself. The large number of references to Scottish religious writers is but the reflection of eighteen happy years spent in the Scottish capital. I wish also to take this opportunity of saying how much I owe to the distinguished editor of the *British Weekly*. The first number of his paper appeared during my student days at Richmond; and, from that day to this, Sir William Robertson Nicoll and the writers whom he first made known to me have been a large part of my intellectual and religious life. My friend the Rev. E. J. Ives has once more read the proof-sheets for me, and in many other ways lent me his generous aid. But it is to my wife that my debt is greatest. The whole of the final sheets of the MS. were written out by her hand, and there is scarcely a page which does not owe something to her criticism and suggestion.

GEORGE JACKSON.

Victoria College,
Toronto, Canada.
July, 1912.

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I

INTRODUCTORY

It is not enough to utter the mysteries of the Spirit, the great mysteries of Christianity, in formulas, true before God, but not understood of the people. The apostle and the prophet are precisely those who have the gift of interpreting these obscure and profound formulas for each man and each age. To translate into the common tongue the mysterious and sacred language . . . to speak the word of God afresh in each age, in accordance with both the novelty of the age and the eternal antiquity of the truth, this is what Paul means by interpreting the unknown tongue. But to do this, the first condition is that a man should appreciate the times he lives in.

PÈRE GRATRY.

Through exclusive preoccupation with even the highest work, the Church may expose herself to irreparable damage. The world around the Church never stands still. In our day it is in swift and violent motion; and out of the troubled element, new knowledge, new ideals, and new problems are rising in bewildering numbers. Unless the Church has at least a part of her mind disengaged to deal with these new births of time—to understand them and absorb them—even the most saintly devotion to practical work will not save her from losing hold of the minds of men. This is a part of the work of the ministry. It is not enough to station on the watch-towers a few men to look out for the signs of the time. Only the diffusion through the teachers of the people as a body of an intelligence able to take a wide survey and a firm grasp of the questions as they arise will enable the Christian faith still to continue what its Founder intended it to be, a leaven leavening the whole lump of life.

JAMES STALKER.

CHAPTER I

Introductory

In an address delivered to the students of a Congregational College, the late Dr. R. W. Dale dwelt on the new conditions created for the Christian Minister through the decay of the great systems of theological truth which gave definite form to the religious thought of other generations. 'A hundred years ago, fifty years ago, thirty years ago,' he said, 'our fathers were in possession of exact definitions of all the great truths of the Christian Faith. Immense provinces of Christian doctrine were laid down in their theological schemes with all the definiteness and clearness of an Ordnance Survey.' In those days the task of the preacher was comparatively simple. 'Definitions of every doctrine were under his hand—accessible at any moment. The substance of his sermons was found for him. He was travelling in a country in which the roads were all made, and in which it was impossible for him to go wrong.' 'Now,' said Dale, 'all this has passed away. The power of the theological tradition is decaying; the illegitimate supremacy of great names has ceased. . . . The substance of the ancient faith remains, but people find it hard to give their faith a definite expression; and on many questions which seem to be remote from the

central truths of the Christian revelation there is the greatest indecision and uncertainty.' Such a position might be one of exceptional advantage, but it was likewise one of exceptional difficulty, and only a man of industry, of courage, and of faith could prove himself equal to it.[1]

Dr. Dale's address was delivered in 1880, and each of the intervening years has lent fresh emphasis to his words. Our whole mental background is rapidly changing. The pulpit may still continue to use the old phraseology, but the pew no longer puts into it the old connotation. Still more significant is the change in the things which we take for granted. The rains and floods of a transition period are upon us, and nothing can escape their testing. The 'indecision and uncertainty' of which Dale spoke have crept inwards from the circumference to the centre, and positions confidently held by men like himself a generation ago are to-day loudly challenged from within the Church itself. It is a new trial which Christianity is called to face in the court of reason—a new trial, in which many of the old witnesses are brusquely bidden to stand down, since their evidence is no longer relevant. And all this means difficulty, perplexity, and pain, and for no man more than for the Christian preacher.

In one sense, of course, the situation is neither new nor strange. Probably there has never been a time when thoughtful men have not been anxious for the future. From the beginning Christianity has stood in the world's great judgement-hall, judging and being judged. Its history, on its intellectual side, has been one long adjustment to an

[1] *The Evangelical Revival and Other Sermons*, pp. 255–286.

ever-changing intellectual environment. And faith has never learned to look on with wholly fearless eyes. The Epistle to the Hebrews shows us with what strain and bewilderment men watched the shaking and removing of things they had counted as abiding as God Himself. In the apologists and creed-makers of the early Church we see Christian thought striving to come to terms with the subtle intellect of Greece. In the sixteenth century a still more difficult adjustment had to be made. 'In the view of Dante and of that phase of human culture which found in him its clearest and sweetest voice, this earth, the fair home of man, was placed in the centre of a universe wherein all things were ordained for his sole behoof: the sun to give him light and warmth, the stars in their courses to preside over his strangely chequered destinies, the winds to blow, the floods to rise, or the fiend of pestilence to stalk abroad over the land—all for the blessing, or the warning, or the chiding, of the chief among God's creatures, Man.' Then came the new Copernican astronomy, and our earth was seen to be but an 'obscure and tiny speck of cosmical matter,' amid an innumerable throng of flaming suns.[1] It was no wonder that for long theology refused to be convinced. And, once again, in the last century the same trying ordeal had to be faced. The doctrine of evolution changed men's whole outlook, and made the third quarter of the nineteenth century one of the most critical in the whole history of civilized man. 'Never before, perhaps,' says a calm and competent observer, 'was there the same danger of a wholesale apostasy

[1] John Fiske's *Destiny of Man*, p. 12.

of the men of mind and culture, not merely from Christianity, but from the religious view of the world.'[1]

In a sense, therefore, there is nothing novel in the situation which confronts us to-day; we are but repeating the experiences of our predecessors. On the other hand, it is not simply the fact that it is *our* experience which leads us to believe that it is one of unusual, and perhaps unequalled, complexity and difficulty. It is in the complexity that the difficulty mainly lies. Not from one quarter alone, but from every quarter—from history, from philosophy, from science—and from all at once, questions are being thrust upon us which it is impossible to ignore. One gains some idea, both of the urgency of the problem, and of the Church's sensitiveness to it, from the Modernist movement in Roman Catholicism represented by Loisy and Tyrrell, and from the number of recent books addressed to the 'modern mind.' Thus—to mention but a few—we have Denney's *The Atonement and the Modern Mind*, Forsyth's *Positive Preaching and Modern Mind*, Shailer Mathews' *The Gospel and the Modern Man*, Temple's *Faith and Modern Thought*, Garvie's *The Christian Certainty and the Modern Perplexity*.[2] Books such as these reveal at once the nature of the questions under discussion, and the swiftness with which the leaven of new ideas is working. In the literature of popular apologetics—and it is the popular literature which shows most clearly

[1] Professor W. P. Paterson, in his Inaugural lecture in the University of Edinburgh, *The Position and the Prospects of Theology*.

[2] It is not without significance that the phrase 'modern mind' has found its way even into a book of prayer: see Dr. J. Hunter's *Devotional Services for Public Worship*, p. 86.

the set and strength of the current—admissions are freely made on such subjects as the Bible, Miracles, the Virgin Birth, the limitations of our Lord's Knowledge, such as no evangelical teacher would have dreamed of making a generation ago. Let a comparison be made of the writings of Dr. Dale and Dr. Denney. One was, the other is, perhaps, the most trusted and influential evangelical theologian of his day. But note—and this is only one contrast out of many—the different way in which they use the Scriptures. Dr. Dale quotes the four Gospels with apparently no suspicion of the genuineness of any saying which they put into our Lord's lips; Dr. Denney writes always with the fear of the critic before his eyes.

Let us take one further illustration. Three years ago, Professor Ernst von Dobschütz, of the University of Strasburg, delivered at the summer school of theology at Oxford, a short course of lectures on the Eschatology of the Four Gospels. The lectures were printed in the *Expositor*, and afterwards published in book form by Messrs. Hodder and Stoughton. The volume was very favourably reviewed by Dr. Denney in a leading article in the *British Weekly*,[1] and was recommended from the pulpit of Westminster Abbey by Dr. Armitage Robinson. A few points gathered from its pages will indicate with sufficient clearness the author's general attitude towards current New Testament questions. He speaks of the Epistle to the Philippians as the last of St. Paul's letters, thus denying by implication the genuineness of the Pastoral Epistles (p. 9). The context of Matt. xvii. 26,

[1] October 13, 1910.

he calls 'a not very trustworthy collection of Peter stories' (p. 148). The great eschatological sermon found in Mark xiii., Matthew xxiv., and Luke xxi. is not, he thinks, 'the report of an original sermon of Jesus, but a composite work, mixing original sayings of Christ with parts of a little apocalypse, as to the origin of which there was and is still some difference of opinion' (p. 86). And, finally, he believes that no modern scholar will deny that Jesus Himself shared the persuasion of His disciples that the great day when all would be changed was to come in the lifetime of their own generation (pp. 6, 52). I do not say that the Professor is wrong in saying these things; it may be that he is wholly right; but the fact that they can be said in a book which has received so many evangelical benedictions shows how far we have travelled since 1880. Can it really be that less than five and twenty years have passed since Anglicanism was convulsed by the mild heresies of *Lux Mundi*, and Marcus Dods was arraigned before the supreme court of his Church as a bold and dangerous man? So readily do the heresies of one generation become the orthodoxies of the next.

It is needless to multiply illustrations, though they lie to our hand on every side. What, now, shall we say to these things? What is the duty of a preacher amid this sudden inrush of new problems? The question is raised, be it observed, not for the student, but for the minister, to whom is committed the care of souls. And for him the main interest in these matters is, if one may so put it, without making an unreal distinction, not intellectual, but evangelical and pastoral. That is to say, he is

concerned with them, not simply as movements of thought, but as movements of thought which may help or hinder him in his task of winning men for God. And it is from this point of view that our whole discussion proceeds.

I

To begin, then, with what is negative, the preacher's attitude to the modern mind should be one neither of scorn, nor of fear, nor of neglect; he must not rail against it, nor be afraid of it, nor ignore it. There are, undoubtedly, tendencies of the modern mind which admit of no compromise, with which we must fight as for very life. But the temptation to rail, to draw cheap applause from the unthinking by denunciations of that which neither they nor we have taken the pains to understand, is the most ignoble to which the preacher can yield. The difficulties which many feel to-day regarding some of the traditional beliefs of Christianity are not assumed; it were an insult to suggest that doubtful morals can account for them; they are inevitable. For what is the modern mind? It is, to borrow the language of Dr. Denney, the mind as it has been 'determined by the influences and experiences of modern times.'[1] Now while some men do succeed, to a surprising degree, in keeping themselves proof against all such influences, the average man is affected by them even when he does not know it. They form the mental climate in which he lives, and from which he can no more

[1] *The Atonement and the Modern Mind*, p. 6.

escape than he can from the physical. Instead, therefore, of railing against the modern mind, our aim should be, first, to understand it, and afterwards, if we may, to serve it. But let us not mock, for 'mockery is the fume of little hearts.'

Neither let us be afraid. After all, we are not the first to face the trials of a new age. The Church has had its transition days before now, and has lived through them. If history has done nothing else for us, it should at least have taught us to be ashamed of the foolish fear that sees a bogey in every unfamiliar truth. The occasional panics to which we are still liable are among the childish things that should long ago have been put away. The Church of Christ is not at the mercy of any man, however eminent he may be, and it really is not to our credit that we should think it necessary, in order to safeguard the interests committed to us, to clamour for the head of a theological pioneer, even though, after the manner of pioneers, he lose his sense of proportion, and talk as if he had discovered some new El Dorado. It is time, too, to drop our bad habit of labelling biblical scholars with whom we do not agree 'extreme' or 'advanced.' The question is surely not whether they are advanced, but whether they are right. If they are right, and in so far as they are right, we should be ready to go all lengths with them. If they are not right, it is possible, and it ought to be sufficient, to show that they are not. After that the truth may be left to take care of itself. Intellectual fear on God's behalf is stupid impiety.

But the temptation to which, perhaps, the preacher most readily falls a prey is to ignore the

problems of the modern mind. To be afraid of them is to show oneself weak; to rail against them is 'bad form'; but to let them alone is easy and may seem wise. Have we not, it is asked, problems enough on our hands of an urgent practical kind, without burdening ourselves with the interminable disputes of Criticism and Theology? In the presence of the vast, unevangelized heathen world, and our worse than heathen hordes at home, ought we not to proclaim a truce in the war of words and give ourselves to the gospel of work? Was it not the evangelism of Wesley, rather than the arguments of Butler, that turned the tide of irreligion in England in the eighteenth century? And is it not the unanswerable logic of deeds for which the world still waits?

The argument and the illustration alike have done duty so often that one is compelled to suppose that some minds find them convincing. Nevertheless, they are profoundly misleading. Of course we must evangelize—at home and abroad. That is our first duty; so far we are all agreed. But is evangelism our first and last and only duty? What, for example, shall we do with the questions raised by our own Scriptures? 'Let them alone,' some will say. And if we could we should be guilty of one of the worst kinds of suicide. But we cannot, for the questions will not let us alone; they are here, clamorous, insistent, refusing to be ignored. The reference to Wesley and Butler, with its implied depreciation of Butler, proves nothing, unless we are prepared to say that the whole work of the Church can be accomplished by the revivalist. We have to win men for God—not some men, but all;

but though we may win some by an appeal which treats the intellect as if it were an outlaw, we can never hope to win all. There is really no use, and no sense, in asking whom the Church needs more, its Wesleys or its Butlers. If it is to do its whole work, it needs both. We are debtors to the Greek and to the Barbarian, to the wise and to the unwise, to the taught and to the untaught; 'and a Church which cannot speak to the intellect of every age of every country in its own tongue, according to its own intellectual methods, has lost that noble gift of which the marvel of Pentecost was a transient and comparatively worthless symbol.'[1]

Still, it may be urged, there is one duty of the Christian scholar, and another of the Christian preacher; and while it may be the duty of the scholar to speak out, it may be equally the duty of the preacher to keep silent. Let it be granted at once that there is a real difference in the responsibility of the two men. As Dr. Forsyth puts it, the minister's conscience is not scientific but pastoral.[2] In other words, while the scholar need ask no more than 'Is this true?' the preacher must also ask 'Is this truth that I can profitably commend to my people?'

> Leave thou thy sister when she prays,
> Her early heaven, her happy views;
> Nor thou with shadowed hint confuse
> A life that leads melodious days.[3]

The appeal goes straight to the heart of every man

[1] Dale's *Evangelical Revival*, p. 24.
[2] *Positive Preaching and Modern Mind*, p. 107.
[3] *In Memoriam*, stanza xxxiii.

with anything of the pastoral instinct; and the preacher who does not know how to adjust his message to the minds of his hearers, softening the impact of new truth for the untaught, and withholding some things from them altogether, because not yet are they able to bear them, is a bungler without fitness for his sacred office. Nevertheless, even for the preacher, there is a time to speak as well as a time to keep silence. There are others with a claim upon his regard besides the 'sister' with her 'early heaven and happy views,' and we may well ask if we are not in danger of pushing our doctrine of reserve too far, and if the time has not come for mixing with our caution a little more candour.

For the peril of the present situation is very real. We are getting the Church's scholarship on one side and the Church's piety on the other, and a wide and perhaps widening gulf between them.[1] In practically all our colleges, and among the great majority of at least the younger generation of our preachers, the teaching and the beliefs concerning the Bible are, it is well known, very different from those which still prevail in our Sunday schools and among the general body of our church members. If, for example, we take Hastings' *Dictionary of the Bible* as registering the practically unanimous findings of modern biblical scholarship, any one acquainted with that work, and with the mind of the average members of our churches, will not need to be told how serious are the divergencies between

[1] The terms are awkward and worse, but I let them stand for the distinctness with which they set forth what I take to be the chief factor of the situation described.

them. The perils of such a situation are too patent to need emphasis; and inasmuch as there is not the smallest possibility of the Church's scholarship going back to the old position, the only thing to do is to bring the Church's piety up to the new. This is the task which Providence has assigned to the preacher of to-day—the task of mediating, of interpreting, of bridge-building. It is a task of almost immeasurable difficulty, but it is one of the difficulties which we are preachers to solve. We may shut our eyes to it, and turn away from it; but the change which we fear will not less certainly come; only what might have been a slow and peaceful growth will come in revolution and agony of spirit, and with catastrophe to many a soul.[1]

II

The place of the preacher, I repeat, is neither with the scornful, nor the fearful, nor the disregarding. What, then, should be his attitude towards those movements of the modern mind which bear so directly on the ministry committed to him? To take what is most obvious first: he must be at pains to know; he must establish sympathetic, understanding relations between himself and his own time. It is true that those who are in grave intellectual perplexity will usually be only a minority in his congregation, and he cannot therefore take thought for them alone; nevertheless, his whole intellectual outlook should be such that the perplexed will be made to feel, even when they are

[1] See a striking passage in *Absente Deo*, p. 69.

not directly addressed, that at least they are understood. Nothing can be more chilling to the generous ardour of an earnest seeker after truth than to discover that the man to whom he had been taught to look up as his spiritual guide has never even sighted the problems that to him are so tremendously real. *To him that is ready to faint*—there are few verses in the Old Testament that a preacher should lay more to heart—*kindness should be showed from his friend; even to him that forsaketh the fear of the Almighty.*[1] Alas! that the physicians of religious perplexity have so often been Job's comforters, 'as the channel of brooks that pass away.'

> When it is hot they are consumed out of their place.
> The caravans that travel by the way of them turn aside;
> They go up into the waste, and perish.
> The caravans of Temah looked,
> The companies of Sheba waited for them.
> They were ashamed because they had hoped;
> They came thither, and were confounded.[2]

Knowledge, real and painstaking, this is the first requisite. What follows must depend on circumstances. It may be that the next step will need to be resistance. As has already been pointed out, there are tendencies of the modern mind with which we can make no terms, which must be withstood to the uttermost. On this aspect of the subject I cannot now dwell. But here again let it be said, it is only knowledge that can make our resistance effective. The ignorant self-complacence with

[1] Job vi. 14 (See G. A. Smith's *Modern Criticism and the Preaching of the Old Testament*, p. 299.)

[2] Ib. vv. 17–20.

which great themes are sometimes disposed of in the pulpit is a thing to make one shudder. We do indeed owe to the time in which God has called us to labour 'the debt of a witness to the Faith distinct, outspoken, unshrinking; we owe it the debt of an earnest and fearless witness of the truth and depth of our convictions; we owe it the debt of showing that we are not ashamed, not even now, of the gospel of Christ.' Not the less do we owe it the debt 'of showing our convictions, as wise and self-commanding men show them; men, penetrated with the greatness of what they support and the greatness of what they oppose; penetrated, too, with the entangled and complicated character of all human questions. . . . We owe the debt of not raising false issues; of not meddling with what we may know that we do not understand; of not darkening counsel, hard very often to reach at best, with a multitude of ill-considered words.'[1]

It would be, however, a strange misunderstanding of the present situation that could hear in it only a call to arms. Are we so blinded that we can trace in the workings of the modern mind nothing but a veiled hostility to the divine will? That would be atheism indeed, and atheism of a peculiarly unlovely kind. God fulfils Himself in many ways, and the intellectual activities of our time all lie within the plan of the divine purpose. The preacher who knows how to take occasion by the hand may find in them the allies he most needs. The fierce torrent which some are vainly seeking to dam up or to dry up, he may use to turn his own mill and grind his

[1] See Dean Church's great sermon 'The Twofold Debt of the Clergy' (*Human Life and its Conditions*, pp. 163–4).

own corn. We shall find illustrations of this as we proceed. Meanwhile, let us learn to be watchful without being suspicious; let us not too hastily assume that all that are not with us are against us; let us take care lest, in the darkness and confusion of our fears, we be found fighting against our own friends and against God.

But perhaps the word which best describes the Church's duty in the present crisis is neither resistance nor acceptance, but rather readjustment. We are called to minister to a distressed faith, to the perplexity which is created by new knowledge. And what is needed to help men in such perplexity, it has been well said, 'is not compromise, for compromise generally means tampering with principle, but readjustment, or fresh correlation, of the things of faith and the things of knowledge.'[1] Such readjustments may be only partially successful; they may break down through an inadequate grasp of the things of faith or the things of knowledge. They are none the less inevitable; in seeking to make them we are but submitting to the necessities of our intellectual life. The fact that others have made them before us can make no difference; we have still to make them for ourselves. We serve, indeed, under a double law which demands our toil and yet denies it all finality. Forms of faith which satisfied our godly forefathers are impossible to us, not because we are godless, but because we are sons; our children in their turn will grow as impatient of ours. 'Modernism,' in all its forms, name and thing alike, may be hateful to us, but we cannot

[1] Bishop Gore in the Preface to the tenth edition of *Lux Mundi*, p. xi.

help ourselves; necessity is laid upon us; we are modern men, and, as Dr. Sanday says, 'when we come to the final appropriation and assimilation of ancient truth, we must appropriate and assimilate it as modern men.'[1] We may be justly scornful of some of the 'new' theologies of our own time—mere lath-and-plaster houses, built in a day and lasting but a day; but a new theology we must have if religion itself is not to die, a theology which provides for the Christian thought and experience of the present their own appropriate forms.

The attempt to set the Christian faith in its true relation to modern intellectual and moral problems is not always fairly judged by those who dissent from some of the doctrinal restatements which it involves. Thus, for example, it is unfair to suggest that the attempted correlation implies in the minds of those who make it any subordination of the things of faith to the things of knowledge. This is not so at all. As I have already pointed out, the attempt springs directly from the necessities of our being. The mind is a unity, and it cannot hold the truths of religion independent of and unrelated to the truths of history, philosophy, and science. Not less unfair is it to speak as if such modifications as theology has been called on to make are of the nature of concessions to unbelief. While these pages are being written I have come across the following from the pen of a well-known preacher in a weekly religious paper: 'The decay of faith is not in the world, but in the Church. The points for which Tom Paine contended in his *Age of Reason* are now affirmed in theological colleges, and advocated in

[1] *The Life of Christ in Recent Research*, p. 103.

the literature of the Church. What I used to hear in my youth from infidel lecturers is now taught by Christian teachers.' Considering who the writer is, this is a truly astonishing misreading of the facts. The change in the teaching of the Bible which is so oddly described—I had almost said, so perversely caricatured—has indeed taken place; but it owes no more to Tom Paine or 'infidel lecturers' than does the most thorough-going traditionalism; it is the direct result of that historical method of study which is one of God's best gifts to the intellectual and religious life of our generation. If the literature of the Church has supplanted the infidel lecture it is only because our new, God-given insight into the true meaning of Scripture has left the old blasphemies without meaning and without excuse.

In the call to readjustment which the modern world addresses to the Church there is nothing that should surprise a Protestant who takes his Protestantism seriously, or a Christian who understands his New Testament and knows something of the course of Christian history. On the Protestant aspect of the matter I am content to adopt the language of Dr. Denney: 'To be true Christians we are bound to Christ; but we are not bound to anything else . . . we are not bound to any man's or to any church's rendering of what He is or has done. We are not bound to any Christology, or to any doctrine of the work of Christ. . . . It is faith which makes a Christian; and when the Christian attitude of the soul to Christ is found, it must be free to raise its own problems and to work out its own solutions.'[1]

[1] *Jesus and the Gospel*, pp. 382–3.

When we turn to the New Testament we see the new faith everywhere adjusting itself to its environment, using the forms of thought with which men were familiar, speaking to every man in the language wherein he was born. This well-known fact has of late received fresh and striking illustration through the brilliant researches of Adolf Deissmann and James Hope Moulton. The language of the New Testament, instead of being, as scholars had so long supposed, a special form of Greek, to be distinguished from all others as 'Biblical' Greek, is now seen to be one in all material respects with the common speech of daily life throughout the Roman world. Adaptation marks the whole life of Jesus, adaptation to the age at which He came into history, and to the men with whom He had to do. 'He was no superman, but a Jew of Palestine in the first decades of this era. His speech was no Volapük or Esperanto, but the simple Aramaic of His day.'[1] When He would set forth the final triumph of His kingdom or the significance of some experience of His own, as in the story of the Temptation, He does so, not in language such as men use to-day, but in parabolic forms suited to His hearers and such as they would best understand.

The same principle underlies the apostolic interpretation of Christ. The Apostles are one in the place which they give to Him, one in their faith in Him as Saviour and Lord; but they are not one in their Christology. In other words, each answers in his own way the questions to which Christ's presence in the world gives rise; and the ground

[1] W. B. Selbie's *Aspects of Christ*, p. 254.

of their varying doctrinal conceptions is to be found both in the idiosyncrasies of the writer and the varying intellectual necessities of his readers. There is, perhaps, no better illustration than is furnished by the doctrine of the Logos in the prologue to the Fourth Gospel. The aim of the writer is identical with that of other writers of the New Testament, namely, to set forth his sense of the significance of Jesus; but he has his own way of accomplishing it: he borrows a philosophical formula which was widely current in his day, and uses it 'to introduce Jesus in circles which naturally thought in such terms.'[1] That is to say, this writer did at the end of the first century, what is still our duty at the beginning of the twentieth: he proclaimed Christ in the terms which, he believed, would most readily reveal and commend Him to the mind of his own generation.

The same adjusting process is at work in every period of intellectual and religious quickening in the Church's history. What lies behind the great historic creeds of Christendom is a patient and courageous attempt to define and defend, in the best terms that the thought of the age made available, the certainties of Christian life and truth. And it may not be out of place to add that, however unsatisfying in some respects we may find them to-day, never were intellectual acumen and spiritual insight more strikingly displayed in the Church's service than in the shaping of these ancient symbols of our faith. It is the difference of intellectual environment which in the main accounts for the differing characteristics of the theology of the East

[1] See *Dictionary of Christ and the Gospels*, ii. 482.

and the West. The speculative East and the practical West worshipped one Lord; but when their faith sought speech for itself, it was inevitable that they should draw apart, for each had to define what it held in relation to its own separate world of ideas.[1] The same task of re-interpretation confronts the modern missionary. It is for him so to present the truth of the gospel that it shall excite the least prejudice and find the most unimpeded access to the minds of his hearers, and therefore he must not fear to break some of the old intellectual moulds in which in the past his faith has been cast. He must put off, so far as may be, the mental habits of the Englishman or the American, and put on those of the Hindu or the Japanese. He must see Christ and he must show Him, not as a mere Westerner, wearing our garb and speaking with our accent; but as the Universal Man, who turns understanding eyes even on those whose ways are least like ours. Always and everywhere adjustment is the law of the Church's life.

As a general principle this will not be questioned. It is when we come to the application of the principle that our differences and difficulties begin. Setting details for the moment aside, one thing seems

[1] 'The Western theology,' says Dean Stanley, 'is essentially logical in form, and based on law. The Eastern is rhetorical in form and based on philosophy. The Latin divine succeeded to the Roman advocate. The Oriental divine succeeded to the Grecian sophist. Out of the logical and legal elements in the West has grown up all that is most peculiar in the scholastic theology of the Middle Ages, the Calvinistic theology of the Reformation. To one or both of these causes of difference may be reduced many of the divergencies which the theological student will trace in regard to dogmatic statements, or to interpretations of scripture, between Tertullian and Origen, between Prosper and Cassian, between Augustine and Chrysostom, between Thomas Aquinas and John Damascenus' (*History of the Eastern Church*, Lecture I).

certain: we must prepare ourselves for the acknowledgement of a much narrower area of certainty than was claimed by the orthodoxy of the past, and for a corresponding simplification of our creed. 'The all-daring and all-embracing Gnosticism' of the older theology is no longer possible. We must all be agnostics, it has been well said, if only we put our agnosticism in the right place; and one of the urgent necessities of the hour, as Professor Paterson truly observes, is 'to draw, and that in earnest, the distinction between verities and problems, and to map off the realm of certitudes from the region in which assurance is unattainable, and in which variety of speculation is admissible.'[1] Take, for example, our doctrine of man. What he is we know: a sinner, yet made for God, and capable of being restored to Him. But how he came to be what he is—the origin of his life, his history, or his sin—we do not know, and it is idle to pretend we do. The early chapters of Genesis are not history, and the problem of origins we must be content to leave to science to make of it what it can. So, too, in regard to the future. We know that Jesus Christ has brought life and immortality to light through the gospel. But when men go on to tell us exactly what is to happen at death and the judgement, who are to be saved, and who lost; when they speak as if a chart of the unseen world were unrolled before their eyes, we listen, if we listen at all, with a growing conviction that these are among the things which the Father hath set within His own authority. And hence, from every side, comes the cry for creed-simplification. 'The old orthodoxy,' says

[1] See Inaugural lecture quoted above.

one orthodox theologian, 'laid on men's believing power more than it could carry'; we must 'reduce the burden.'[1] And another, greatly daring, takes in hand to show us how we may do it. Dr. Denney would have us abolish all our present doctrinal tests and substitute for them this simple declaration: 'I believe in God through Jesus Christ His only Son our Lord and Saviour.'[2] When one of the foremost teachers of a Church which has been conspicuous among the Churches for its tenacious adherence to formula commits himself to a suggestion like this, we may be quite sure that the day of elaborate confessions, with their trenchant handling of great mysteries, is far spent.

Nor can a follower of John Wesley find anything in this to lament. In one sense, it is true, he belongs to those whom Mrs. Humphry Ward scornfully calls 'the certain people'[3]; he is not afraid to say, 'I know.' But the certainties on which Methodism has laid the emphasis, and by which it has kept its soul alive, have always been those of the central and narrower area of Christian life and experience. It has wandered freely and at will over the broad lands of theological speculation; but it has staked out no claim; it has never become a settler there, with established rights for which it was ready to lay down its life. On this point nothing could

[1] P. T. Forsyth's *Positive Preaching and Modern Mind*, p. 124.

[2] *Jesus and the Gospel*, p. 398. Cp. the words written by Bishop Lightfoot from his deathbed on the subject of Inspiration: 'There is nothing so dangerous on such a topic as the desire to make every thing right and tight. I do not know whether it is that my mind is not logical, but I find that my faith suffers nothing by leaving a thousand questions open, so long as I am convinced on two or three main lines' (Quoted in Canon Hensley Henson's *Liberty of Prophesying*, p. 121).

[3] 'The force of things is against *the certain people*' (Introduction to *Amiel's Journal*, p. xliii.)

be more explicit than the repeated declarations of John Wesley: 'One circumstance,' he wrote (July 13, 1788), 'is quite peculiar to the people called Methodists; that is the terms upon which any person may be admitted into their Society. They do not impose, in order to their admission, any opinions whatever. Let them hold particular or general redemption, absolute or conditional decrees; let them be Churchmen or Dissenters, Presbyterians or Independents, it is no obstacle. Let them choose one mode of baptism or another, it is no bar to their admission. A Presbyterian may be a Presbyterian still; the Independent or Anabaptist use his own mode of worship. So may the Quaker, and none will contend with him about it. They think, and let think. One condition, and one only, is required—a real desire to save their soul. Where this is, it is enough: they desire no more: they lay stress upon nothing else: they ask only, "Is thy heart herein as my heart? If it be, give me thy hand." '[1]

III

Looking back for a moment on this brief discussion of general principles, and before passing to the greater detail of the chapters that follow, it may be well to state, in summary form, what seems to be the duty towards each other of the preacher and the Church at the present hour.

On the one hand, if a preacher is setting forth what is felt by many to be new, and perhaps

[1] *Works*, vol. xiii., p. 266.

dangerous doctrine, there are two things which the Church has a right not only to expect, but to demand from him. In the first place, he ought to avoid all needless provocation in the manner and methods of his advocacy. There is an arrogant unwisdom on the part of some would-be pioneers which should be snubbed and silenced without mercy. No man has any right to go about the Churches setting simple, godly folk by the ears. It may often be needful to disturb ancient prepossessions—the ground must be cleared before the new building can go up—but the preacher should take care not to leave in the minds of his hearers a final sense of loss. Whatever the momentary impression may be, the net result of his teaching should be positive, not negative; it should make for edification, not for confusion. And where a preacher's own common sense is insufficient to secure this, the Church has a right to intervene to protect its own interests. In the second place, the Church has a right to receive from its teachers unequivocal assurance of their loyalty to Christ. Each may be left to give the assurance in his own way; but it must be given, without hesitation and without ambiguity. The preacher owes it to himself and to all to whom he ministers to make it clear that he has not only inherited the Christian *ethos* but has passed through the Christian experience, that Christ is for him not only Example and Friend, but Saviour and Lord. And no one, it is no uncharity to say, has any right to eat the bread of an evangelical Church for whom these things are in doubt.[1]

[1] See an admirable paragraph in Garvie's *The Christian Certainty and the Modern Perplexity*, p. 8.

During the early ministry of Dr. Dale a considerable number of the Carr's Lane congregation were greatly exercised by what they judged to be his departure from the recognized standards of their Church. The sermons that gave rise to the uneasiness were preached in the morning, and to a congregation of whom very many were not present at night. A friend, in discussing the state of affairs, suggested that he should change his usual method, and should preach in the morning such a sermon as he was accustomed to preach at night. 'If, now,' she said, 'you were to preach such a gospel sermon as you gave us in the evening a fortnight ago, it would at once be seen that the charge of unorthodoxy is baseless.' But Dale refused: 'I could not do that,' he said; 'that would be preaching Christ for my own ends.' And to this decision he firmly held.[1] Every one will honour Dale's motive; yet it may be questioned if he were not mistaken, and if he would not have done well to take his friend's advice. A congregation has a right to ask, and a preacher should feel it a duty to give, early and unmistakable pledges of his loyalty to the great verities of the Christian gospel.

On the other hand, where these two demands of the Church are fairly met, the preacher, on his side, has a right to all the liberty for which he cares to ask. After all, it is a man's affirmations that are of importance, not his denials. And if the right affirmations are made, the wise will not concern themselves about the rest. The incident in Dr. Dale's ministry to which reference has just been made occurred during his co-pastorate with Dr.

[1] *Life of R. W. Dale*, by his son, p. 114.

Angell James. When the trouble was at its height, the older man, with a courage and generosity which did him equal credit, went to one after another of those whom he knew to be disquieted, and exerted all his influence and authority to calm their fears and to remove their suspicions. 'Now you leave the young man alone,' he said; 'he has the root of the matter in him.' And when a Church is assured that its minister has 'the root of the matter in him,' it may and it ought to leave him alone. There is a sure instinct which tells a congregation when the interests of Christian truth are safe in its minister's hands; and when that instinct is satisfied, there is no need to invoke the authority of any ecclesiastical tribunal. If, as Dr. Denney says, evangelical Christians are to maintain their intellectual integrity and preach the gospel in a world which is intellectually free, we must learn to distinguish between our faith and inherited forms of doctrine which have been unreflectingly identified with it.[1] Only by liberty, trustfully accorded on the one side and reverently made use of on the other, can we ever attain to that truer intellectual expression of Christianity for which we are all waiting.

[1] *Jesus and the Gospel*, p. 383.

II

ETHICAL PREACHING

You would think it, and may be, not spare to call it, a poor cold sermon, that was made up of such plain precepts as these: *Honour all men; love the brotherhood; fear God; honour the king;* and yet this is the language of God, it is His way, this foolish despicable way by which He guides, and brings to heaven them that believe.

ARCHBISHOP LEIGHTON.

The Christian life presupposes the Christian religion. When, therefore, we speak of Christian ethics, we do not mean a series of precepts, or a course of conduct which may be adopted by the adherents of any other creed, but the life which is the practical outcome of belief in the Incarnation, and which it was the object of the Incarnation to introduce into the world.

J. R. ILLINGWORTH.

CHAPTER II

Ethical Preaching

It has already been pointed out that it would be a great mistake on the part of the preacher were he to assume toward the modern mind a general attitude of antagonism or distrust. In some of its characteristics and tendencies it is his true fellow worker, setting his gospel in a larger place, and providing for him a new vantage-ground from which to urge his great appeal. It is this aspect of the subject which will find illustration in the present chapter.

I

No sign of our modern life is more welcome and hopeful than its large ethical interest. On every hand, and in all the relationships of life, men are learning to recognize the primacy of the moral. Not in the Church alone—to our reproach, be it said, sometimes less notably there than elsewhere—they are putting all things to the ethical test. There are, indeed, those who tell us that modern society is simply organized selfishness, that we are heading straight for the abyss, that catastrophe cannot long be averted; and, of course, it is easy to furnish facts

to justify their gloomy forecasts. Nevertheless, it is probably true that never before in the history of the civilized world have ethical ideals been so dominant, never have men been so genuinely solicitous to know and to do what is right as in these opening years of the twentieth century. Two or three facts will illustrate in different ways the ethical temper of which I speak.

We may take, first, the language of certain eminent teachers of our day who own little or no allegiance to the Christian Church. Lord Morley, for example, in his earlier writings, ranges himself without qualification among the most confident apostles of unbelief. Nevertheless, and especially since the publication of his *Life of Gladstone*, Christians have found it increasingly difficult to number him with the Gentiles of the outer court; they have seen in him, it has been well said, 'a nobility of feeling and a sympathetic quality missed in many of the straiter sects.' One quotation from his writings must suffice. In an address on 'Popular Culture' he utters a not unneeded protest against the excessive supremacy often claimed for physical science, 'as if,' he says, 'moral advance, the progressive elevation of types of character and ethical ideals, were not at least an equally important cause of improvement in civilization. *The type of St. Vincent de Paul is plainly as indispensable to progress as the type of Newton.*'[1] We find the same ethical emphasis in the pages of Matthew Arnold. Every one is familiar with his dictum that conduct is three-fourths of life. But, perhaps, the best illustration for our purpose is the first of his three

[1] *Miscellanies*, vol. iii., p. 15 (italics mine).

Discourses in America, for nowhere is his testimony on behalf of virtue and right conduct more earnestly delivered. Taking as the text of his discourse, 'the inexhaustibly fruitful truth that moral causes govern the standing and the falling of States,' he asks, 'What is saving?' in the life of a people, and for answer he turns to the Hebrew prophets who tell us that what is saving is to 'order one's conversation right,' to 'cease to do evil,' to 'delight in the law of the Eternal,' and to 'make one's study in it all day long.' True, these are not the things that come into the heads of most of us when we are thinking of politics. Nevertheless, it is these things, he maintains, and not the things of which the heads of politicians are full, that do really govern politics and save or destroy States, that save or destroy them by a silent, inexorable fatality.[1]

And now—to go back a generation—beside those noble words we may set these not less noble from the pen of Mazzini, the great prophet of Italian unity: 'If,' he says in the preface to his *Duties of Man*, 'if you would emancipate yourselves from the arbitrary rule and tyranny of man, you must begin by rightly adoring God. And in the world's great battle between the two great principles of Good and Evil, you must openly enrol yourselves beneath the banner of the first, and ceaselessly combat the second. . . . My voice may sound too harsh, and I may too severely insist on proclaiming the necessity of virtue and sacrifice; but I know, and you too, untainted by false doctrine and unspoiled

[1] It is interesting to be told by Mr. G. W. E. Russell that Arnold declared that his *Discourses in America* was the book by which, of all his prose writings, he most wished to be remembered (*Matthew Arnold*, Literary Lives series, p. 192).

by wealth, will soon know also that the sole origin of every right is in a duty fulfilled.'

Thus far the thinker. Nor is the man on the street, in his own very different way, any less emphatic. He does not, it is true, talk about 'ethics'; but, whenever he comes to speak of religion, whether he be in the Church or out of it, and especially if he be out of it, his tests are mainly ethical: 'What is it good for?' Let any one note the religious controversies which break out from time to time in the correspondence columns of the press. While they do not, as a rule, cast much light on the subject under discussion, incidentally they do on the minds of the correspondents themselves. And almost invariably they reveal to us the presence in our midst of a vast body of men and women whose interests are not in Christian dogmatics but in Christian duty, who ask themselves and who ask us, not, 'Is Christianity true?' but 'Assuming it to be true, why does it not do more for us?' There is, of course, nothing new in this. 'Show me thy faith by thy works' is a very old demand. The majority of people are always more interested in results than in processes; they are more eager to be told 'what' than 'why.' What is new in the present situation is the insistence and universality with which the old test is being applied.

But it is in the manifold activities of the social conscience that our modern ethical interest finds its clearest expression. Wherein, we sometimes ask, lies the distinguishing glory of our age? In what direction will the student of the future turn his eyes as he seeks to estimate its individual contribution to the world's life? Certainly not to our

art or literature, for there we have little to offer. However we may explain it, whether we can explain it or not, the dearth of creative intellectual power of the first order is manifest to all. Nor, probably, will he point to the wondrous inventiveness of which we are so justly proud, which has harnessed the great forces of Nature and made them serviceable to man. If we have any glory that excelleth it is to be found rather in this: 'The moralizing of society in its ideas, its conduct, its systems, and its institutions.' Not content with humanizing war, we are seeking to abolish it. The legislatures of the world are vying with each other in their programmes of social reform. Among all classes a new sense of responsibility towards the disinherited and the unprivileged is at work. Humanitarianism has become a passion, 'redressing human wrongs' the statesman's first endeavour. Commerce, legislation, education, philanthropy, all bear witness to the reign of the new ethical ideals.[1]

And now to all these things, for their strengthening and justifying, comes the new and popular philosophy of Pragmatism. Of the merits of this philosophy I am not competent to speak, but I note that it is being variously judged. On the one hand, we are assured that we have only to follow Professor William James and his friends, and they will lead

[1] 'There never was a time, there never was an age when, from the highest to the lowest, there was more common human-heartedness, more earnest desire to alleviate the lot of those who have to perform the hard services of the world and face its gusty insecurities; and never a time when people were more willing to make personal sacrifices. I know people who hate their own luxury, and if anybody, any statesman would tell them how, by stripping themselves of this or that luxury, they would lighten the lot of those whose lot is hard, they would do it.' (Lord Morley, quoted in *Hibbert Journal*, April, 1911.)

us into the promised land. Others predict, with equal confidence, that we shall all stumble into the ditch together. These are matters that we may leave the philosophical doctors to discuss among themselves. For us the point to observe is this: Pragmatism teaches that 'the sole significance of thought for us is the effect which it is fitted to produce in conduct, whilst conceptions which make no practical difference to conduct may be ignored.'[1] As Professor James puts it, 'The only meaning of truth is the possibility of verification by experience,' and 'true is the term applied to whatever it is practically profitable to believe.' In other words, 'truth has always cash value.' Its proof is not logical but dynamical; it is demonstrated by what it does. And if it does nothing, if it will not work, it is not truth and has no further claim upon our allegiance. 'If there were any part of a thought that made no difference in the thought's practical consequences, then that part would be no proper element of the thought's significance.'[2] Again, I say, of the truth of all this others must be left to judge. Here I have only to point out that in so far as it is true, or is accepted as true, it fits in with and reinforces the demand that religion, too, must justify itself by its works.

II

Such, then, is the ethical temper of the time to which we are called to minister. How may we best

[1] See an article by Mr. Eric S. Waterhouse in the *London Quarterly Review*, April, 1908.

[2] *Varieties of Religious Experience*, p. 444.

relate our message as preachers to it? In seeking to answer this question it will be well, first, to take a brief glance backward, in order, if possible, to learn something from the mistakes of the past. For it is no breach of the charity which we owe to the dead no less than to the living to say that hitherto the Church has done no sort of justice to the ethical teaching of the New Testament. It has suffered its interest in Christian ethics to be submerged by its far greater interest in Christian dogmatics. Quite early in its history, it was, so to speak, thrown off its balance by philosophy; and while it is mere petulance to rail at philosophy, since, so long as we are thinking beings, a philosophy we must have, it is none the less to the Church's incalculable hurt that the lost equilibrium is only now being regained.

The Reformation did much toward restoring the true balance by the new development which it gave to the conception of human righteousness; but, as Dr. Dale has remarked, it was not a development 'corresponding to that which was given to the conception of the prerogatives and powers which are our inheritance in Christ. The commandment was not broadened with the promise.'[1] Perhaps the best illustration of the Church's long prepossession by dogmatic interests is to be found in its literature. As Principal Garvie says, there is far less literature which has become classical on Christian duty than on Christian doctrine.[2] One of my distinguished predecessors in this lectureship laments the dearth of English books dealing even with so great a theme

[1] *The Evangelical Revival and other Sermons*, p. 279.
[2] *The Christian Certainty and the Modern Perplexity*, p. 26.

as the Conscience.[1] And even such ethical literature as we do possess is sometimes marked by the most curious limitations of outlook. Thus, for example, Mr. Edmund Gosse points out that the propaganda of beneficence that fills so large a place in Christian minds to-day was unknown to the great divines of the seventeenth century, whether Catholic or Protestant. 'We may search,' he says, 'the famous *Rule and Exercises of Holy Living* from cover to cover and not learn that Jeremy Taylor would have thought that any activity of the district visitor or the Salvation lassie came within the category of saintliness.'[2] Even yet, it is said, there are theological colleges in Great Britain that provide no instruction in the science of Christian morality, and students who obtain theological degrees without any course of study in that subject.

The sin of this neglect lies at the door of all the Churches, but it has been made a special reproach against those who bear the evangelical name. Dean Church, in his history of the Oxford Movement, while readily acknowledging the great public results achieved by evangelical religion through its countless philanthropies, goes on to speak of the evangelical party in the Anglican Church at the end of the first quarter of the last century as follows: 'It shrank, in its fear of mere moralizing, in its horror of the idea of merit or of the value of good works, from coming into contact with the manifold realities of the spirit of man: it never seemed to get beyond the "first beginnings" of Christian teaching, the call to repent, the assurance of forgiveness:

[1] See Preface to Dr. W. T. Davison's *Christian Conscience*.

[2] *Father and Son*, p. 334.

it had nothing to say to the long and varied process of building up the new life of truth and goodness: it was nervously afraid of departing from the consecrated phrases of its school, and in the perpetual iteration of them it lost hold of the meaning they may once have had.'[1] This is the judgement of an outsider, and its severity is unmistakable; but Evangelicalism has had the mirror held up to it not less faithfully within its own household and by its best friends. Wesley himself, for example, in one of his letters, puts his finger on the same peril as the Dean, though he describes it in characteristically different language: 'I find,' he says, 'more profit in sermons on either good tempers or good works than in what are vulgarly called gospel sermons. That term has now become a mere cant word: I wish none of our society would use it. It has no determinate meaning. Let but a pert, self-sufficient animal that has neither sense nor grace, bawl out something about Christ, or His blood, or justification by faith, and his hearers cry out, "What a fine gospel sermon!" Surely the Methodists have not so learned Christ! We know no gospel without salvation from sin.'[2]

Dr. Dale, in his more stately fashion, brings the same charge of ethical sterility against the Evangelicalism of a later day: 'The Evangelical Revival, which inherited the theology of Protestantism, ought to have accepted the responsibility of carrying forward the moral reformation which Protestantism had only begun. . . . As yet, however, the Evangelical Revival has done very little to give

[1] *The Oxford Movement*, p. 15.

[2] *Works*, vol. xiii., p. 36.

us a nobler and more Christian ideal of practical life. It has been very timid. It has shrunk from politics. It has regarded literature and art with a certain measure of distrust. In business it has been content with attaching divine sanctions to recognized virtues. We are living in a new world, and Evangelicals do not seem to have discovered it. The immense development of the manufacturing industries, the wider separation of classes in great towns—a separation produced by the increase of commercial wealth—the new relations which have grown up between the employers and the employed, the spread of popular education, the growth of a vast popular literature, the increased political power of the masses of the people, the gradual decay of the old aristocratic organization of society, and the advance in many forms of the spirit of democracy, have urgently demanded fresh applications of the eternal ideas of the Christian Faith to conduct. But Evangelical Christians have hardly touched the new ethical problems which have come with the new time.'[1]

More than thirty years have passed since Dale's words were spoken, and some at least of the counts in his indictment would need now to be greatly modified, if not altogether withdrawn. But even yet Evangelicalism has not wholly outgrown its traditional distrust of 'good works.' Is it not significant that, among the thousands of Spurgeon's published sermons, there is not, I believe, one on any of the Ten Commandments? Are there not still good people in our Churches who, if they hear what they call a 'moral sermon,' do so with the

[1] *The Evangelical Revival*, pp. 35, 38.

uneasy suspicion that it is not 'the gospel' that is being preached to them? I remember receiving, one Monday evening, a letter from some one who had been present in the church in which, on the previous day, I had conducted public worship. My correspondent told me that he had come to the service, 'hoping to hear the gospel preached.' 'But,' said he, 'I was much disappointed. I thought you missed a splendid opportunity of telling to a large concourse of people the way of salvation, which as a minister of the gospel you are commissioned to do.' What actually had happened? I had read that section of St. Paul's Epistle to the Colossians in which he gives counsel to wives and husbands, to children and to parents, to servants and to masters; and then, with the Apostle's words as my text, I had preached a sermon on Family Life and Family Religion, because it seemed to me that, if the Apostle thought it worth while to give up a third of a chapter in one short letter to writing about these things, it could hardly be a mistake to ask a Christian congregation on a Sunday morning to spend half an hour in thinking about what he had written. And this was what came of it: I was told that I was not preaching the gospel.[1]

But a change for the better is coming. The old suspicions die hard, but they are dying. Morality is at last coming to its own in the household of faith. Tens of thousands of earnest workers who have caught their inspiration for service from the lips of evangelical teachers are patiently striving to apply

[1] I have referred to this incident before; see *A Young Man's Religion*, p. 124.

the ethical principles of Jesus to the problems of modern society. Our colleges, too, as Principal Garvie says, 'are awakening to discover that they have been neglecting something which essentially belongs to the thorough furnishing of the man of God for every good work. It is no vain prophecy,' he adds, 'that in the future Christian Ethics will be studied as carefully and thoroughly as its companion discipline, Christian Dogmatics, has been in the past.'[1] This is the spirit in which the Church is preparing itself to meet the new ethical temper in the world without of which I have already spoken. And it is for the preacher to accept with alacrity the challenge implicit in the situation of the hour. He cannot, indeed, escape it. Judgement by consequences is the demand of our time; and all things, including his gospel, must submit to it; the modern mind will have nothing to do with a religion that cannot be ethically construed. And why should we wish it otherwise? What better thing can he ask for his gospel than that it be given a chance to show what is in it to do? This is no hostile mood which he must somehow break, or bend to his will; it is his already if he have but the wit to use it. Why he should welcome it, and the high ends it may be made to serve, it will be the aim of the rest of this chapter to make plain.

III

1. In the first place, the modern ethical emphasis should be welcomed in the interests of sound

[1] *The Christian Certainty and the Modern Perplexity*, p. 27.

doctrine. We all know how theology has influenced ethics; but we do not always realize that the influence has been mutual, and that changed ethical conceptions have had fully as much to do with modifications of theology as any changes in our intellectual outlook. Consciously or not, man is always summoning his creed to the bar of his conscience; and while, of course, no infallibility can be claimed for the judgements of the individual conscience, on the other hand, nothing can permanently keep its place in our creed which conscience refuses to endorse. There may be a period of uncertainty and conflict—and for the earnest soul it is as the very sharpness of death when faith and conscience seem to be at strife—but there can be no doubt of the issue: it can never be the will of God that my mind should receive as true what my moral nature rejects as false. The ethical principles which the Christian revelation itself has evoked must be the final judge of all that claims to come to us with divine authority. Truth, 'as truth is in Jesus,' has always this witness, that it commends itself to every man's conscience in the sight of God. Let us call to mind the changes which have already passed over some of our theological conceptions in obedience to this great law.

Take, for example, our methods of interpreting certain difficult narratives of the Old Testament. The older theories of inspiration had led us into a hopeless *impasse*. God must be held responsible for everything that the biblical writers attributed to Him. If, for example, they said that He commanded the wholesale extermination of the Canaanites, and that He was well pleased with the execution of Rizpah's innocent sons, then so must it

be. Conscience protested, only to have its protests smothered by the repressive reverence which the older theories fostered. The moral confusion steadily grew worse, the protests of conscience louder ; a way out had somehow to be found. And when the historical method of study offered itself as a guide, the Christian conscience which had prepared the way for its coming gladly hailed it as the looked-for deliverer. Probably nothing so much helped to commend modern methods of biblical study to the Christian mind as the unspeakable relief which they brought to multitudes of tender and overburdened consciences. 'We dare now to believe that nothing unworthy of ideal humanity can be ascribed to the divine reality.'[1]

Why, again, do we hear so little to-day of certain once familiar explanations of the Atonement, with their crude analogies drawn from the police-court, and even from the pawn-shop? It is not simply that they have been banned by a truer exegesis ; a keener moral sense has declared them inadequate and worse. Conscience is wholly within its rights in maintaining that no explanation of Christ's saving work is tenable which is unworthy of the Father whom He has revealed. As we might have anticipated, it is in our thoughts of God Himself that the results of this moralizing of theology are most clearly seen. We have all admired young Milton's nobly stern ideal, to live 'as ever in my great Taskmaster's eye,' but who has not felt his admiration shaded by regret that the poet should have used such a name for God? It is true to Puritanism ; but is it true

[1] *The Christian Certainty and the Modern Perplexity*, p. 36. Dr. Garvie's chapter, 'Conscience and Creed,' contains an admirable discussion of the whole subject.

to the New Testament? Would any Christian poet speak of God thus to-day? Yet we read the same Bible as did our fathers; why, then, do we not think of Him as they did? Because the ideas, in the light of which the Bible is always interpreted, are so different. As Principal Garvie says, 'When the father's might was the right of the home, when teachers flogged learning into their scholars, it was easy to believe in a God whose authority was arbitrary, and whose decrees were inscrutable. But as our manners and morals have become more humane, it has become impossible to enthrone tyranny in heaven.' When the public conscience found nothing to condemn in the torture of criminals, when the whole idea underlying our legal enactments was the wrongdoer's punishment, when as yet no one had raised the question if it might not be the duty of society not only to punish but also to save, theologians found nothing incredible in the idea that sinners might endure eternal torments at the hands of an angry God. But when legislation became remedial as well as penal, when torture was abolished, when even the most inhuman fiend was granted a swift and painless death, it was obvious that the old theological conceptions could no longer stand their ground. They were not driven off the field by a battery of proof-texts, they were simply killed off by a change of moral climate.[1]

[1] Another illustration of the moralizing of theology is given by Professor A. S. Peake. Speaking on the subject of the limitations of our Lord's knowledge, he says: 'The Gospel narrative exhibits Jesus as human through and through. He is bone of our bone and flesh of our flesh, and that not only in the physical conditions, but the mental and the spiritual. He confesses His ignorance in a matter of high theological importance. He asks for information in such a way as to imply that He did not possess it. We must avoid the profanity of suggesting that He deliberately gave a false impression, nor may

But this is not all. The ethical principle does not work only one way. It is a two-edged sword, and it turns as sharp an edge against some of our present ways of thinking in religion as against any of the past. What kind of terms, for example, can a really robust ethic make with the Christ of modern sentiment? If it will have nothing to do with a Christ who 'disarms the wrath of God,' will it be more tolerant of one who is all tears and tenderness? Will it not insist on seeing in the Christ of the Gospels not only 'the friend of publicans and sinners,' the genial Christ, the comrade Christ, the 'gentle Jesus, meek and mild' of our children's hymn, but also the angry Christ, with the scourge in His hand and the blue vein throbbing in His temples? How little, too, there is that is ethical in many of our current conceptions of the divine forgiveness! 'Of course, God will forgive,' we say; 'that is what He is God for.' But this is just the kind of language the writers of the New Testament uniformly abstain from using. There is no 'of course' about God's forgiveness for them. It is a wonder, a marvel, which only infinite love revealed in infinite sacrifice has made possible. For man, it has been well said, forgiveness is the plainest of

we seek to save His omniscience at the expense of His absolute truthfulness. It would be a deep disloyalty to accuse Him of unreality. We are in fact shut up to one of two conclusions—either Christ did not know certain things, or He pretended not to know. Now, there has been a time in the history of the Church when men have been so keenly alive to theological that they were dull to moral considerations, and actually uttered such statements as that Christ usefully pretended not to know. Happily such a saying would now be felt to be an outrage on the veracity of our Lord, even by those who do not realize that the only alternative to it is to accept quite frankly the limitations of His knowledge' (*Christianity, its Nature and its Truth*, p. 252). I should like to take this opportunity of saying that of all recent works in popular Apologetics, I know nothing quite so good as the volume by Professor Peake from which this extract is taken.

duties; for God it is the profoundest of problems.[1] And theories of the Atonement which do not recognize this fact, and make room for it, are as far from satisfying the demands of conscience as they are from doing justice to the statements of Scripture. If it is an unworthy conception of God which makes of Him a kind of Lord Chief Justice of the universe, is not that still more so which degrades Him to the level of a weak and indulgent Eli? 'There's a kindness in His justice'; yes, and there is a justice in His kindness, and a true ethic will no more allow us to forget the one than the other. God is *Holy Father*, and we must emphasize the adjective equally with the noun. Religion and theology alike have need to ponder the great saying of an Apostle: *If ye call on Him as Father . . . pass the time of your sojourning in fear.*

In the interests of sound doctrine, I repeat, the preacher should be the first to welcome the demand that theology be made ethical, for it means, as Dr. Forsyth says, 'the primacy and finality of the holy in his construction of the gospel.'[2]

2. Again, the modern ethical emphasis is to be welcomed for its own sake, in the interests of morality. It may not always have a directly religious origin, but it works towards a religious end. Christianity, it cannot too often be said, is at bottom a method of goodness; it is God's way of making men good. And preaching is His instrument to that end. If, then, amid the facts and forces of our own time we find one that makes strongly and steadily for righteousness, we ought thankfully

[1] See Carnegie Simpson's *Fact of Christ*, p. 143.

[2] *Positive Preaching and Modern Mind*, p. 302.

to recognize it and put ourselves into line with it. In other words, not only must our doctrine have ethical warrant, we must insist as unweariedly as any moralist on the supremacy of virtue and right conduct. We must expound and enforce, in all their variety and significance, the moral demands of the gospel.

It can hardly be necessary to point out with what growing clearness modern biblical study has set forth the moral mission of the Hebrew prophets. The Jew was not a philosopher; he had no genius for intellectual speculation; but in his feeling for conduct and character the gifted Greek is a mere child beside him. This is the glory and wonder of the Old Testament: the fixed light, the steady glow, with which through all its pages, law and prophecy and psalm, there shines and burns the passion for righteousness, the hatred of iniquity. It is this moral supremacy, which criticism may indeed reveal but can never destroy, which gives to the Old Testament its lonely pre-eminence among all the records and survivals of the past. For those who are familiar with Hebrew prophecy no single passage can really represent either its intellectual splendour or its moral majesty; but I venture to make one quotation, not so much for any beauty of diction or unwonted elevation of thought, but rather for the vigour and directness of its moral teaching. It is Jeremiah's address to Judah, delivered at the Temple gate—a kind of sermon at the church door:

Hear the word of the Lord, all ye of Judah, that enter in at these gates to worship the Lord. Thus saith the Lord of hosts, the God of Israel, Amend your ways and your doings, and I

will cause you to dwell in this place. Trust ye not in lying words, saying, The temple of the Lord, the temple of the Lord, the temple of the Lord are these. For if ye throughly amend your ways and your doings; if ye throughly execute judgement between a man and his neighbour, if ye oppress not the stranger, the fatherless, and the widow, and shed not innocent blood in this place, neither walk after other gods to your own hurt: then will I cause you to dwell in this place, in the land that I gave to your fathers, from of old even for evermore. Behold, ye trust in lying words, that cannot profit. Will ye steal, murder, and commit adultery, and swear falsely, and burn incense unto Baal, and walk after other gods whom ye have not known, and come and stand before Me in this house, which is called by my name, and say, We are delivered; that ye may do all these abominations? Is this house which is called by My name become a den of robbers in your eyes? Behold I, even I, have seen it, saith the Lord. But go ye now into My place which was in Shiloh, where I caused My name to dwell at the first, and see what I did to it for the wickedness of My people Israel. And now, because ye have done all these works, saith the Lord, and I spake unto you, rising up early and speaking, but ye heard not; therefore will I do unto the house, which is called by My name, wherein ye trust, and unto the place which I gave to you and to your fathers, as I have done to Shiloh. And I will cast you out of My sight, as I have cast out all your brethren, even the whole seed of Ephraim.[1]

It is this clear ethical note which the modern mind justly demands of the modern pulpit. It may sound plausible to say, 'Give men sound doctrine, get them converted, and morality may be left to take care of itself'; but all experience warns us that even among the regenerate it is never safe to take morality for granted. Readers of *Mark Rutherford* will remember Marden's outburst against Mr. Snale: 'He is a contemptible cur; and yet it is not his fault. He has heard sermons about all sorts of supernatural subjects for thirty years, and he has

[1] Jer. vii. 2–15.

never yet been warned against meanness, so of course he supposes that supernatural subjects are everything, and meanness is nothing.' This is not caricature, it is portraiture; and the moral for the preacher is plain; not, indeed, to banish 'supernatural subjects to Saturn,' but, after the manner of the New Testament, to keep them hard by life and duty, to be then most plainly ethical when we are most profoundly doctrinal. *The fruit of the Spirit,* Paul says, *is* πίστις, that is, not 'faith' simply, but faithfulness. Πιστός in the New Testament is a two-sided word, one side turned God-ward, the other man-ward, so that the believer is both one who trusts, and one who can be trusted; he is both one who believes in God, and one in whom other people can believe.[1] And therefore, in season and out of season, the preacher must insist on the obligation of the godly to be good. He must learn to define salvation in terms of character. He must emphasize anew the great old virtues of truthfulness, justice, honesty, industry, temperance. He must reassert the ancient truisms that principle is more than taste, that character is more than culture, that without holiness it is impossible to please God. He must tell men plainly that they may be 'religious,' but that if they cheat and lie, if they incur debts which they have no means of paying, if they amass wealth, ignorant and careless of the degradation of those whose toil has created it, they break Christ's commandments, they are none of His. In one word, he must make religion, through the whole reach of its activities, and in its every thread and fibre, moral.

[1] See Lightfoot's *Galatians*, p. 157.

It is to preaching of this kind that we look to remove from Christianity its chief hindrance, and to restore to it its most powerful witness.

Every Christian worker at home and abroad knows that the one thing that is needed to make straight paths for the gospel is that Christians should be really Christian. On the other hand, the appeal of the saintly life never fails.[1] The evidence for Christianity. Henry Drummond used to say, is not the 'Evidences,' the evidence for Christianity is a Christian. Really to *be* a Christian is always the most effective way of preaching Christianity. And if a preacher can point, like St. Paul, to what the gospel in his hands is doing—how *in all the world it is bearing fruit and increasing*—no argument that is formed against him will prosper, his faith in it will never be put to shame. But an apologetic which is only on paper is a gimlet that has lost its handle—the most provokingly helpless thing in the world. The future belongs to the religion that can pay the largest ethical dividend.

All this is commonplace, so obvious and trite that a writer feels ashamed to commit it to paper. Yet a Fernley lecturer may be forgiven if he remind his fellow Methodists and himself that it is for the defence and advocacy of such commonplaces that

[1] This, as is well known, was the argument which the early Christian apologists pressed with such unanswerable force: 'They could throw down the challenge, Are not Christians better than heathens? Are not our common people more virtuous than your philosophers? Is not conversion morally a change for the better? Do we not leave behind the three great sins of idolatry, whoredom, and usury, and become sober and peaceable men, fearing God, and eschewing evil? What fault can you find with us, except that we are Christians? But no human skill can put the full force of this argument. Deeper than we know is the appeal of a saintly life, peradventure sealed with blood: and if many of the Christians fell far short of saintliness, there were saints enough among them to overcome the world.' (Gwatkin's *Early Church History*, vol. i., p. 201.)

they are set. The fifty-three sermons of Wesley, which still form part of the doctrinal standards of our Church, contain not only sermons on Original Sin, the New Birth, Salvation by Faith, the Witness of the Spirit, and Christian Perfection, but on such subjects as the Cure of Evil-speaking, the Use of Money, and the Reformation of Manners, as well as not less than thirteen discourses in exposition of the Sermon on the Mount. Surely if there is any ministry whose ordination vows lay upon them the obligation to proclaim an ethical gospel it is the ministry of 'the people called Methodists.'

3. Above all, the preacher should rejoice in the modern ethical emphasis, because of the vantage-ground it gives him from which to urge the claims of Christ upon the souls of men. Let the primacy of the moral be granted, and there are certain unescapable conclusions which he should be quick to seize and to press home. 'Nothing,' says Matthew Arnold, 'will do except righteousness; and no other conception of righteousness will do, except Jesus Christ's conception of it.'[1] The two halves of this judgement cannot well be separated. If Christ is no more than 'our highest, holiest manhood.' He is at least that, and men to whom goodness is the principal thing cannot leave Him out of their reckoning. To care for righteousness, and yet not to care for Him, is as if one should profess a love of literature, and yet be indifferent to Shakespeare. Still less can Christ be ignored when from the ideal we turn to seek the path by which it

[1] *Literature and Dogma*, p. 219.

is to be attained. If even the definition of righteousness is impossible without reference to Him, still more is its victorious achievement. And it is in this moral inability, to which the literature of the race bears such tragic witness, that the supreme opportunity of the preacher lies: proclaiming Christ he proclaims at once the Pattern and the Perfecter of human life. The late Dr. Marcus Dods once spoke of the debt which all Christendom owes to the author of *Ecce Homo* in forcing on the recognition of the educated world this twofold fact: the identity of Christian law with the highest ethical demands, and the identity of the influence imparted by Christ with the supreme and alone sufficient ethical dynamic. A word in emphasis of these two points may bring this chapter to a close.

(1) 'The identity of Christian law with the highest ethical demands.' I shall be told, perhaps, that this is a large assumption which I have no right to make, that in point of fact it is sharply questioned on many sides. Thus, for example, it is asserted by some, like Nietzsche, that our whole scale of moral values is wrong, that self-assertion, not self-sacrifice, is the true law of man's being[1]; by others, that the Sermon on the Mount is useless in our modern social order, for the simple reason that it is unworkable; and again, by others, like the much discussed Schweitzer and his school, that the moral teaching of Jesus is only of the nature of 'interim ethics,' designed to tide over the brief period of waiting before the consummation of all things, and that we altogether misunderstand its true character when we seek to exalt it into a permanent ideal. To

[1] See Paulsen's *System of Ethics*, p. 151.

all these various attempts to put down the morality of the New Testament from the high place which for so long it has held in the judgement of civilized men it might not unreasonably be replied, *Securus judicat orbis terrarum*—the whole world cannot go wrong; and however it may be with a few moral or intellectual eccentrics, the mass of mankind is assured that the highest morality is one with the Christian law. In any case it is needless to discuss the matter here, since those at least to whom the preacher makes his appeal will not hesitate to admit the identity. The prevailing attitude of the modern man to Christianity has been defined as one of intellectual confusion but of moral sympathy.[1] There is, alas, no doubt of the intellectual confusion, and just as little, happily, of the moral sympathy. Nothing, we are all ready to say with Arnold, nothing will do but righteousness, and no other conception of righteousness but Christ's.

And when men speak thus the preacher should take them at their word, and hold them to it. Faith in righteousness is not indeed everything, but it gives the preacher what most of all he needs, a footing and a fulcrum. He could not be content to end with it, but he may be thankful to be able to begin with it. We cannot too often remind ourselves how infinitely varied is the appeal which Christ makes to men, and how manifold is their response. It is a mistaken zeal which, not content with winning men, would seek to determine the manner of their coming. There are many paths to the goal, and each must journey as he can. Of one thing we may be sure: faith in goodness is always saving,

[1] The phrase is Professor Shailer Mathews'.

and he who holds fast to that, though he fetch a wide compass first, will reach the goal at last. To convict of righteousness is not less truly the Spirit's work than to convict of sin ; and to them who have found in Christ the perfect example and the sovereign law of conduct, He will yet reveal Himself as their Lord and their God.

(2). When from the ethical ideal we turn to the ethical dynamic, the preacher's opportunity becomes still greater. One fact in the moral history of the past stands out with impressive clearness : that just at the point where philosophy has always confronted its supreme problem, the discovery of an adequate ' virtue-making power,' Christianity has achieved its supreme triumph. This is not a preconceived theory of what should have happened, it is a bare statement of what actually has happened. Christianity has unsealed in the soul the springs of a new power which has given victory even to the weakest and worst of men. The simple, confident language of a great living writer finds its echo in the experience of multitudes : ' I only speak my own experience,' says Mark Rutherford, ' I am not talking theology or philosophy. I *know* what I am saying, and can point out the times and places when I should have fallen if I had been able to rely for guidance on nothing better than a commandment or a deduction. But the pure, calm, heroic figure of Jesus confronted me, and I succeeded. I had no doubt as to what *He* would have done, and through Him I did not doubt what I ought to do.' When, therefore, men emphasize the ethical, when they insist that nothing will do but righteousness, and no other conception of righteousness but

Christ's, we need not fear that they are making too much of mere morality; the thing to be feared is rather that they should not make enough of it. If they really care about it, if they are really in earnest, it will be impossible long to avoid the question of ways and means. And when that is fairly faced there are but two alternatives: moral insolvency, or the calling in of a new power from without. Then is the preacher's hour; a great door and effectual is opened unto him, and there are many helpers. What man most needs is not so much light but power, 'virtue-making power,' and it is power the preacher brings. *Seek the things that are above*, says the Apostle; but his message does not end there. As Dr. John Duncan used to say, it is the glory of the gospel that it turns our abstracts into concretes[1]; and therefore the Apostle goes on, *where Christ is, seated on the right hand of God*. 'The spiritual world to him represented not the hard, cold heights of a moral order, not even Alpine virtues . . . but a vital personal tie to the risen and reigning Christ.'[2] This is the central fire from which the Christian life has ever radiated. As an old writer puts it, 'Paul did not desire spiritual insight; he wanted Jesus.' And it is this Jesus whom we preach, *Christ the power of God*, the Giver of the new life He demands, the one supreme and sufficient ethical dynamic.

[1] *Colloquia Peripatetica*, p. 117.

[2] J. Moffatt's *Golden Book of John Owen*, p. 92.

III

DOCTRINAL PREACHING

The root of much unbelief or uncertainty lies in the fact that people do not understand their own religion. Often they have mistaken some caricature of the gospel for the gospel itself. And he who would commend Christianity to our perplexed and distracted age must himself understand the religion for whose acceptance he pleads. And this has a practical relation to the pulpit. There is more staying power in a ministry which gives theology an important place than in a ministry which lives from hand to mouth, to which the last nine days' wonder is the breath of life. It is not theology that has wearied people; it is the insufferable tediousness, the dry-as-dust pedantry with which it was often presented that has wearied out the patience of the long-suffering hearer. There is always room for a ministry which will patiently and sympathetically unravel the tangle of men's thoughts on the deepest things. For men do think on them even if they have ceased to look for light from the Church.

A. S. Peake.

All through his life, Principal Rainy's preaching was preaching that made people think about God—God in Christ, God in history, God in experience—and therefore, whatever other qualities it may have had or lacked, it always had greatness in it.

P. Carnegie Simpson.

CHAPTER III

Doctrinal Preaching

Our preaching must be ethical; thus far we are all agreed. But does morality exhaust our mandate? Is the Church but an ethical society, with this as its *differentia*, that it finds its standard in the teaching of Jesus and the New Testament? Shall we say, with the author of *Supernatural Religion* and with many others, that morality was the essence of Christ's system, and theology but an afterthought; that it is the theologians that have muddied the clear stream and darkened the fair landscape? And since doctrine is at best but an uncertain path which soon enters the forest and is lost, while morality is a plain highway wherein none need err, were it not better, at least for the average man, to stick to what is simple and obvious, and win for himself the benediction of the practical preacher, rather than strive for the more doubtful honour of the learned divine? To all these questions, and to many of the assumptions underlying them, I answer with an unhesitating, 'No.' Preaching must be doctrinal as well as ethical; it must be doctrinal before it is ethical; it must be doctrinal in order that it may be truly and effectually ethical. These are the points which it will be the aim of this chapter to make good.

I

It is often said that theology to-day has fallen on evil times, that it no longer occupies the place in men's minds which was once ungrudgingly accorded it. Comparisons of this kind are as easy to make as they are difficult to prove or disprove. It may be that to our fathers of fifty or a hundred years ago Christian truth was the chief interest of their lives; I am not sure. It may be that we, their degenerate sons, care for none of these things; again I am not sure, though I very much doubt whether the present interest in theology is at as low an ebb as is often assumed. The probable truth is that neither now nor at any time have Christian men and women cared for Christian truth as it deserves to be cared for. What is disturbing and distressing is to find theology flouted by those whose duty it is to understand and teach it. Popular preachers have been known to declare that they found more help in the preparation of their sermons from current fiction than from current theology. And if one were to judge from some of the church advertisements in the press, he might imagine that preachers were appointed to discuss any subject under heaven, literary, social, or political, rather than the great doctrines of the Christian faith. When theology is thus openly ignored or derided by the pulpit, it can hardly surprise us if the interest of the pew is but languid.

It must in fairness be admitted that if their science has fallen into disrepute, the theologians have themselves in no small degree to thank for it. For one thing, they have been, as a class, almost

shamelessly negligent in the matter of style. Robert Hall once spoke of John Gill's *Exposition of the Bible* as 'a continent of mud'; and it is hardly an exaggeration to say that very much of the theology of the past appears to have been written on the principle that in order to be read it is not necessary to be readable.[1] Not unfrequently, too, its substance has been as unattractive as its form. It has wearied and repelled men by its refinements and subtleties, by its insistence on formulas which have lost their meaning, by its attempts to reach the unattainable and to define the undefinable, and, above all, by its wretched controversies, idle as the chattering of sparrows, about straws and sticks and the dust of the floor. Of course, these are not faults peculiar to theology, and the sister sciences should drop with shame the stones they have taken up to stone her, for not one of them is without sin. Yet even though in this matter theology were shown to be a sinner above all the rest, theology we still must have. For Christianity is truth as well as life, and theology is but the homage which reason pays to religion as truth. That our knowledge is limited, that our best thought-forms are inadequate, that we should be ready to modify them as the boundaries of our knowledge are enlarged—these things we ought always to be able to take for granted. But to treat with scorn the attempt to give worthy intellectual expression to the contents of our faith is sheer wantonness of

[1] Here, for example, is a sentence from a recent work in English theology: 'It is the Cross that ethicizes, universalizes, and therefore laicizes Christianity.' When a sensitive reader comes on a sentence like that he shuts up the book with a snap and a shudder. The subject of the preacher's style is dealt with at length in a later chapter.

which grown men ought to be ashamed. When the offence is committed in a Christian pulpit, the offender should be sent away into Arabia, and no more suffered to show himself unto Israel until he have put on a saner spirit.[1]

One frequent form of this unspeakably foolish depreciation is to be found in the false and facile contrasts, to which reference has already been made,[2] between the Church's thinkers and apologists on the one side, and her evangelists and martyrs on the other. At one time it is Butler and Wesley who furnish the illustration; at another it is the history of the early Church. The simplest mind is moved by the appeal of the martyrs, by the constancy and courage of Ignatius and Polycarp, of Blandina and Perpetua and Felicitas. But it was not only in the dungeon, the amphitheatre, and the catacombs—

> Where she hid
> Her head 'mid ignominy, death, and tombs—

that the Church's battle had to be fought; she had to hold her own on the broad fields of the world's intellectual life; she had to win the mind as well as move the heart of the world she had set forth to conquer. And he is reading history with

[1] Let me recall in this connexion the eminently wise and true words of Dean Church: 'Dogmas are but expedients, common to all great departments of human thought, and felt in all to be necessary for representing what are believed as truths, for exhibiting their order and consequences, for expressing the meaning of terms, and the relations of thought. If they are wrong, they are, like everything else in the world, open to be proved wrong, if they are inadequate they are open to correction; but it is idle to sneer at them for being what they must be, if religious facts and truths are to be followed out by the thoughts and expressed by the language of men' (*Occasional Papers*, vol. ii., p. 458).

[2] See p. 11.

one eye shut who cannot see in the splendid intellectual supremacy of Clement of Alexandria, Tertullian, Origen, Athanasius and Augustine, a gift of the same good Spirit who inspired the steadfastness and devotion of the martyrs. We are all familiar to weariness with Thomas Carlyle's sneer at the great Athanasian controversy, 'their vain janglings about Homoousion and Homoiousion,' 'the Christian world torn in pieces over a diphthong.' But not every one knows or remembers that in his old age, when the scorn and fierceness of youth had passed, Carlyle confessed to Froude that he had been mistaken, that Christianity itself was at stake, and that if the Arians had won, it would have dwindled away into a legend.[1]

The same prejudice against theology reveals itself in those false alternatives so dear to many, but which to all who try to think clearly are simply the most irritating things in the world. Thus it is said that what we want is not creed but conduct, not doctrine but life; the essence of Christianity is to be found not in the Nicene Creed but in the Sermon on the Mount. Could there be anything more provokingly unreal? Of course we want conduct and life and the Sermon on the Mount. But what sense is there in pitting these against doctrine and creeds? Is it of no importance to rational beings to learn to think clearly and accurately on the greatest of all subjects? Or are we going to claim mental haziness as an aid to holiness? The favourite form which this false antithesis assumes to-day is the familiar 'fact *versus* theory,' which meets us so often in the discussion of the

[1] *Carlyle's Life in London*, vol. ii., p. 494.

Atonement. The distinction has a curious fascination for some minds, and it points to an obvious and undoubted truth; none the less it runs perilously near to the shores of No-meaning. As Dr. Warfield has pointed out, facts which have no connexion with what we call doctrine could have no meaning to us whatsoever. It is what we call doctrine which gives all their significance to facts. A fact without doctrine is simply a fact not understood. 'If, then, we are to affirm that Christianity consists of facts, wholly separated from those ideas by which these facts obtain their significance and meaning, what shall we do but destroy all that we know as Christianity altogether? The great facts that constitute Christianity are just as "naked" as any other facts, and are just as meaningless to us as any other facts, until they are not only perceived but understood, i.e., until not only they themselves but their doctrinal significance is made known to us.'[1]

[1] *The Right of Systematic Theology*, pp. 35, 37.

'It is not an inexplicable fact, but only a fact which conveys truth, that can affect the spiritual life of men. It does so because of the divine reason within it. That reason may not be laid bare to the reflective consciousness of those who are moved by it. But it is there, implicit in the facts. And the power which it possesses to move men is the guarantee that it will, if challenged, yield up its meaning by degrees to patient seekers after it. Blank mystery does not move men, for their faith means insight. That insight may be dim, its first efforts to justify itself may be obscure, conflicting, and even partially misleading. But spiritual power can only come from inherent reason, and where reason is inherent there must be no despair of discovering and setting it forth' (J. Scott Lidgett's *Spiritual Principle of the Atonement*, p. 498).

'Religious truth is truth that has in it to be a motive and persuasion and appeal to the life of thinking beings. Its facts, then, cannot be facts impenetrable to thought. They must be luminous, not opaque. To deny this of the Atonement is really to dislodge it from religion and make it a mere algebraical fact. It will indeed ever stretch beyond us into mystery, and it is good for us thereby to be reminded that God's thoughts are "greater than the measure of our minds"—but it cannot be *merely* a mystery. Its principles, however inexhaustible, must be approachable. To Christian thought and

No one in our day has contended more earnestly for the rights of Christian doctrine than Dr. Dale. Very early in his ministry, he tells us, a senior minister talking with him in a friendly way about his preaching, said to him, 'I hear that you are preaching doctrinal sermons to the congregation at Carr's Lane; they will not stand it.' Dale answered, 'They will have to stand it.'[1] He admitted afterwards that there was too much of the insolent self-confidence of youth in both the temper and the form of his reply; but the conception of the ministry which it expressed was, he believed, in the main a just one, and to it his own ministry remained steadfastly true. One of his earliest volumes of sermons—now out of print[2]—contains a noble discourse preached on the occasion of the tercentenary celebration of Shakespeare's birth, and entitled 'Genius the Gift of God.' He had sometimes tried, he said, to imagine what would have been the preciousness of that legacy which Shakespeare would have left to the world had his genius been wholly devoted to illustrate and enforce religious truth. The highest ministry of all in which the intellect can be engaged, he maintained, is in direct connexion with religion, and to relegate it to inferior provinces of thought he held to be a crime against God and man. It is impossible, he said, that we should truly serve God with the

experience they must suggest not the dumb darkness of mystery but the light of rational and moral truth' (P. Carnegie Simpson's *The Fact of Christ*, p. 152). See also J. Denney's *Studies in Theology*, p. 106, and article, 'Fact and Theory,' *Dictionary of Christ and the Gospels*, vol. i., p. 562.

[1] See Preface to his *Christian Doctrine*.

[2] *Discourses on Special Occasions*.

spirit unless we serve Him with the understanding also. 'The vague uncertainty of theological thought with which some men ask us to be satisfied casts dishonour on the dignity of the human intellect, and impeaches the sincerity of divine revelation.'

This was in 1864. Thirty years later, the year before his death, we find him writing to a friend: 'The vagueness of thought which prevails among intelligent people with regard to Christian doctrine is a serious injury to the vigour of religious life. The injury is the graver because of the increasing precision with which men are thinking about natural phenomena. In one region of the intellectual life there is granite, above it are clouds.'[1] While the intellect has no part, or very little part, in the religious life, the religious life—this was Dale's ceaseless contention—will never have in it the elements of enduring vigour.

II

Besides these general considerations in behalf of doctrinal preaching, there are two further facts which should give pause to those who so confidently advise the preacher to stick to morals and let doctrine go.

1. In the first place, Christianity is not reducible to a system of ethics. A man may, of course, make the reduction. By a liberal use of the knife he may get rid of everything which will not fit into his ethical categories, and, calling what is left

[1] *Life*, p. 670.

by the Christian name, he may seek with all earnestness and sincerity to urge it on his fellow men. What has to be said is that this is not Christian preaching, and still less is the thing preached Christianity. The centuries of Christian history and the New Testament alike refuse to recognize in this ethical residuum the Christian gospel. Whatever authority we attach to the apostolic interpretation of Christianity, even if we attach none, we can hardly deny to truly representative Christian men the right to say wherein the core of their belief is to be found; and, as Bishop Lightfoot says, 'one might have thought it impossible to study with common attention the records of the apostles and martyrs of the first ages or of the saints and heroes of the later Church, without seeing that the consciousness of personal union with Christ, the belief in His abiding presence, was the mainspring of their actions and the fountain of all their strength.'[1] Take, for example, that remarkable document of early Christianity, the Epistle to Diognetus—'a fragment without a name and without a date, a single page torn out of the vast volume of Christian literature in the second century, which, with a few meagre exceptions, has altogether perished.'[2] Chronologically, it lies at but a short remove from both the *Discourses* of Epictetus and the *Meditations* of Marcus Aurelius, but no one can fail to observe how different is the atmosphere of this tiny Christian writing from that of the great Roman moralists. There is morality high and noble indeed, but here

[1] Dissertation; 'St. Paul and Seneca,' in *Philippians*, p. 326.

[2] Lightfoot's *Apostolic Fathers* gives both the text and a translation of this remarkable letter. See also Gwatkin's *Selections from Early Christian Writers*, p. 13.

is morality with an added something which transfigures the whole. What that something is this unknown writer makes quite clear. 'He does not refer you'—I am again quoting Lightfoot—'to the moral precepts of the gospel, or to the social organization of the Church, or to the philosophical dogmas of Christianity, but to a Person and a Fact. Not a word is said about any of those five causes which Gibbon parades before his readers when he attempts to account for the unparalleled triumphs of Christianity. . . These, so far as they are causes, are only secondary causes; they are not the root and stem, but only the leaves and fruit of the great tree which was to overshadow the earth. The root itself, as this writer conceives it, is the incarnation of the Divine Word, the realization of God's love and God's presence through the human life and death of Christ. Here is the mainspring of this unique energy, the hidden source of this new and vigorous life.'[1]

But it is unnecessary to go beyond the sayings of Jesus Himself in order to show how vain is the endeavour to separate the morality of the New Testament from its doctrine. We may, if we choose, pour contempt on the Nicene Creed and shut ourselves up to the Sermon on the Mount and a few kindred sayings, but doctrinal questions will seek us out even there, and give us no rest until we answer them. *Many will say to Me in that day,*

[1] *Historical Essays*, p. 7. Lightfoot's main contention in this paragraph is, I think, beyond question; at the same time he seems to be a little less than fair in his reference to the great historian of the Roman Empire. Gibbon states quite explicitly that his purpose is to set forth 'not indeed what were the first, but what were the secondary causes of the rapid growth of the Christian Church' (*Decline and Fall*, chap. xv.).

Lord, Lord, did we not prophesy by Thy name, and by Thy name cast out devils and by Thy name do many mighty works? Then will I profess unto them, I never knew you: depart from Me, ye that work iniquity (Matt. vii. 22, 23). *Come unto Me, all ye that labour, and are heavy-laden, and I will give you rest* (Matt. xi. 28). If this is how Jesus was wont to speak, will not His words, unless we are resolved to empty them of more than half their meaning, compel us to ask who this is who thus speaks? And the moment we do that, the biggest of all the problems of theology is on our hands. Behind all Christ's words—behind those we take no less than behind those we leave—stands the Person of Christ Himself, with the old question upon His lips, which none who have really seen or heard Him can long evade: *Who say ye that I am?*

2. In the second place, it must be remembered that when men call for a purely ethical gospel, it is no new thing that they are asking. Ethical preaching has a history. Not once nor twice it has had an opportunity to show what it can do; and the results are certainly not assuring. This is, I know well, one of the stock evangelical commonplaces, and it almost requires courage to repeat it. It is none the less a fact that cannot be left out of our reckoning. It is said that once in a poor district of Aberdeen, where open-air preaching is common, a Unitarian minister bravely faced the people and preached his gospel to them; but after a time or two they told him that if that was all he had to tell them, it was of no use his coming. 'Your rope,' said one fallen woman standing by, 'is nae lang eneuch for me.'[1]

[1] The story is told in Dr. R. F. Horton's *My Belief*, p. 91.

This is the condemnation of all preaching that cuts itself off from the great redemptive facts of the Christian gospel: its rope is too short. It may see the goal; it is without feet and arms to carry men to it. It was here that the great moral experiment of Stoicism failed; it lacked the dynamic by which alone its great ideals could become operative. Strong in words, it was weak in power; it had no creative energy; it could summon the forces of human nature, it could not minister to its weakness. In clear and ringing tones it pointed the way to the great bare heights of duty, but it laid no gracious constraint on unwilling feet, binding them to the difficult task; and when because of the steepness of the way men faltered and fell, it opened to them no source of inward renewing and strength. It fills us with wonder that in such an age such ideals, so pure, so unworldly, so austere, should even have entered into men's hearts; and when we turn to the lives of Epictetus and Marcus Aurelius our wonder deepens into something like reverent awe; humanity, we feel sure, will never wind itself higher. And yet how little Stoicism could do even with its chief disciple on the throne of the Empire! 'Marcus Aurelius,' says Matthew Arnold, 'saved his own soul by his righteousness, and he could do no more.'[1] His example availed nothing even with his only son; after his death the vast Empire over which he had reigned went steadily to pieces. 'In his character, beautiful as it is, there is something melancholy, circumscribed, and ineffectual.' *Ineffectual*—the rope was too short even in the hands of a Marcus Aurelius.

[1] *Essays in Criticism*, First Series.

The Church in England tried the experiment on something like a national scale during the eighteenth century. The main substance of such of its preaching as was not controversial was good commonplace morality, defended by ordinary common sense, and supported by appeals to the ordinary facts of daily life—'Don't get drunk, or you will ruin your health; nor commit murder, or you will come to the gallows; every man should seek to be happy, and the way to be happy is to be thoroughly respectable'[1]—with results that are writ large in the history of the century. Once more the rope was too short. Scotland repeated the experiment during the dreary reign of Moderatism. And here, of course, our classic authority is Dr. Chalmers' farewell 'Address to the Inhabitants of the Parish of Kilmany.' Referring to the results of his ministry among them during the years prior to the great experience which wrought so mighty a change in him, he says: 'I cannot but record the effect of an actual though undesigned experiment, which I prosecuted for upwards of twelve years among you. For the greater part of that time I could expatiate on the meanness of dishonesty, on the villany of falsehood, on the despicable acts of calumny; in a word, upon all those deformities of character which awaken the natural indignation of the human heart against the pests and the disturbers of human society. . . . I certainly did press the reformations of honour, and truth, and integrity among my people: but I never once heard of any such reformations having been effected amongst them. . . .

[1] The summary is Sir Leslie Stephen's: *English Thought in the Eighteenth Century*, vol. ii., p. 336.

It was not till the contemplations of my people were turned to the great and essential elements in the business of a soul providing for its interest with God and the concerns of its eternity that I ever heard of any of those subordinate reformations which I aforetime made the earnest and the zealous object of my ministrations. . . . You have taught me that to preach Christ is the only effective way of preaching morality in all its branches, and out of your humble cottages I have gathered a lesson which I pray God I may be enabled to carry with all its simplicity, into a wider theatre, and to bring with all the power of its subduing efficacy upon the vices of a more crowded population.'[1]

There is no mistaking the significance of facts like these. When the Church suffers itself to sink to the level of an ethical society, even its ethical virtue has gone from it; it has become weak even as others. There is only one kind of preaching that has ever been able to give guarantees to morality, and that is the preaching which magnifies the grace of God in Jesus Christ. A pulpit with no other message to men than 'Do this, and live,' is a dead thing in a dead world. And here, it may be said in passing, is the explanation, and in part the justification, of the attitude of the older evangelicals towards morality and 'moral sermons,' to which reference has already been made in a previous chapter. Their language was often confused and faulty, and I have nothing to unsay of what has already been said in condemnation of it. Yet the instinct that prompted it was sound. These good men knew that almost the least adequate of all

[1] Hanna's *Memoirs of Dr. Chalmers*, vol. i, p.p. 430–432.

the terms under which Christ's relation to us may be set forth is that of Ideal. They knew, too, that men are not made good by doing good things which they can add up and reckon to their credit. They believed, and rightly, that reformation springs from regeneration, and they refused to indulge in the spurious optimism which ties grapes to thorns and then persuades itself it has wrought a miracle.[1]

III

Christian preaching, then, must be both ethical and doctrinal. But the latter term needs defining, and we must be careful not to make our definition too rigid. Preaching which gives their right place to the great Christian facts may justly claim to be doctrinal, even though the facts be not set forth with the ordered precision of the systematic theologian. We must be prepared to allow both to ourselves and to others the largest liberty of method, provided always that justice be done to the facts. A preacher may take some great theme like the Person of Christ, or the Forgiveness of Sins. He may set forth what he conceives to be the teaching of Scripture concerning it, guarding it from misconception, relating it to the thought of his own time, and throughout not fearing to use when necessary, the technical or semi-technical terms of theological science. This is doctrinal preaching of the most obvious and literal kind, and it may be well to glance for a moment at a great example of it. Once more I turn to Dr. Dale: 'To ensure a

[1] See Shailer Mathew's *The Gospel and the Modern Man*, p. 292.

certain measure of fullness and completeness in his presentation of truth, and to avoid the danger of failing to give to any of the great doctrines of the Christian faith an adequate place in his preaching, it was his habit to draw up in December or January a list of some of the subjects on which he wished to preach during the following twelve months,' and his well-known volume *Christian Doctrine*, which deals with such subjects as The Existence of God, The Divinity of Christ, The Trinity, Sin, and The Atonement, shows with what thoroughness his plans were carried into effect.[1] Many preachers, it is to be feared, would feel, in undertaking a task like this, they were taking their life into their hands. Certainly they would need to harden their hearts and to stop their ears against that section of their congregations which delights itself in sweetness, and desires above all things brevity and simplicity. But a little pulpit stiffening of that kind would be all clear gain. Brevity no doubt is good, and simplicity is better. But we cannot always be talking to babes and beginners, and this demand that everything shall be made short and sweet and simple is not to be yielded to. As Dr. Stalker pertinently asks, 'Is the Bible always simple? Is Job simple, or Isaiah? Is the Epistle to the Romans simple, or Galatians?'[2] 'Milk for babes,' certainly; but meat for men, and the Church in which the pew does not demand it and the pulpit does not provide it is doomed.

[1] *Life*, p. 109. In addition to these doctrinal subjects, it should be said, some great Christian duties were included in the plans, such as Truthfulness, Kindness, Industry, Courage, Justice, and Contentment.

[2] *The Preacher and His Models*, p. 250.

Probably, however, we are in danger of exaggerating the reluctance of Christian congregations to listen to preaching of the type of Dale's *Christian Doctrine*. This was Dale's own opinion: 'So far,' he said, 'from finding that a congregation will not "stand" doctrinal sermons, my experience is that such sermons, if of moderate length, are of great interest to large numbers of Christian people.'[1] But, of course, it was not the 'moderate length' that secured the interest, it was the preacher; and if we could always have a Dale in the pulpit, we should be a long way on the road to the solution of our problem. But what is the average man to do who has neither Dale's strength nor Dale's opportunity? I would counsel him to begin with a much less ambitious plan. Instead of attempting to expound in an orderly and systematic manner all the principal doctrines of the Christian Faith, let him take any of them which have gripped his own mind and heart and preach on them. The one thing to be avoided in doctrinal preaching, as indeed in all preaching, is unreality. It is no use trying to 'get up' sermons in cold blood. We must wait until, as Spurgeon once put it, a subject leaps at us, like a lion from a thicket, and compels us to speak about it. Bishop Hannington's biographer says of him that

> He never dealt
> In the false coinage of a truth unfelt.[2]

That is the only kind of preaching that tells. Once during a holiday, Dr. Alexander Whyte says, he

[1] *Christian Doctrine*, preface, p. vii.
[2] E. C. Dawson's *James Hannington*, p 88.

took up to give it another trial, Bishop Andrewes' much praised sermon on justification ; but, he adds, with the old result : 'The doctrine was all right when I got at it. The doctrine was the Pauline, Lutheran, Puritan, Presbyterian, only possible doctrine on that text and on that topic ; but the magnificent doctrine never kindled the preacher, never gave him wings, never carried him away, never fused nor took the slag out of his style, never to the end of his sermon made him a great preacher of a great gospel.'[1] And that, or something like that, is likely to be the end of all preaching when the preacher has chosen his subject rather from a feeling that he ought to say something about it, than because some inward compulsion will not let him keep silence. We should, of course, seek to make our own the whole circle of Christian truth. On the other hand, it is quite possible to take our doctrinal lop-sidedness too seriously. After all, we are not the only preachers, nor is our to-morrow limited by our to-day. Surely, then, it were wiser to trust to others, or to the larger knowledge which the future may bring, to make good the deficiencies of the present, than to sacrifice reality to a spurious symmetry.

And now it is necessary to recall our warning against over-rigidity of definition. In urging that preaching must be doctrinal as well as ethical I am not seeking to 'standardize' the type represented by Dale. The doctrine may be implicit rather than explicit ; it may be in the preacher's mind rather than on his lips ; the vine may hide the trellis-work that supports it. Yet, while carefully refraining

[1] *Lancelot Andrewes*, p. 16.

from the use of a single theological term, it may be no less manifest that the preacher's whole soul is swept and swayed by the divine certainties which centre in Christ. No one can read the sermons of the world's great preachers without feeling that the vital force within them all is Christian truth; but the one life reveals itself in an endless variety of form. Dale's preaching, for example, is in its form as unlike Maclaren's, or Spurgeon's, or Church's or Brooks', as these are unlike each other; yet for them all, spiritual truth was the world in which they made their home, the spring from which they drew their strength.

It is for doctrinal preaching in this wider and more general sense of the term that I wish to plead. Whatever else our preaching fails to do, it must make the spiritual real to men; it must open for them a window towards the sky, a door into the infinite. We must not only speak to men of God, we must make men conscious of Him. 'Whatever be the outside of our lives,' a great Scottish teacher used to say, 'the inside is God'[1]; and what we most need is not so much proofs of His existence, or definitions of His attributes, but rather the quickening into a larger life of the slumbering God-consciousness that is in us all. Is it not this unfailing sense of God that gives their peculiar impressiveness to the words of the great Hebrew prophets? Greater even than their magnificent ethical emphasis, lying behind it and explaining it, the root of all their multitudinous and beneficent energy, is their conviction that God lives and reigns. Indeed, this

[1] See A. Taylor Innes' Biographical Introduction to A. B. Davidson's *Called of God*, p. 45.

is the true mark of the prophet, ancient or modern, that he brings with him, and can call forth in others, this consciousness of the Divine, the certainty that above gold, above pleasure, above power, God is. Nor is this in any sense a return to the false other-worldliness of a bygone day. This world is real, and, what is more, we have to live in it. But just in order that we may live in it worthily we need to overarch it with an infinite heaven. The seen needs the unseen, not only to dower it with dignity and with strength, but to give it reasonableness and meaning. And it is of the unseen that the preacher is set for a witness and a sign. He must realize it and make it real. Amid the thousand voices that tell man he is of the earth earthy, it is for him to proclaim his heavenly birth and bid him be true to it.

It is our failure here that goes far to explain whatever ineffectiveness may be justly urged against the modern pulpit. It is too mundane in its temper, too terrestrial in its outlook. It lacks the spaciousness of the New Testament. It has no breadth of sky, no far horizons. It is repeating the error of the old Ptolemaic astronomy, which made the earth the centre of all things. It insists on duty but leaves out God, and is content to live in a world of lesser motives. And though it has had committed to it the ministry of reconciliation, it forsakes its high calling to peddle in the small wares of the politician and social reformer. A few random illustrations will explain what is meant.

Reference has already been made to the matter of Church advertisements. It is not the occasional bad taste or downright vulgarity, bad as these

are, which distresses one so much as the naked and unblushing secularity of the preacher's themes. Anything apparently will serve as a text, and when the Bible fails there is always the newspaper to fall back upon. And even when the Bible is used, what small meanings we sometimes read into its big texts, how strangely shy we are of its great themes! Our preaching is suburban; it makes its home in the outskirts, and is a stranger in the citadel of Christian truth; it contents itself with picking up pebbles on the beach, and fears to launch out into the great deep. 'You can't preach,' Dr. Parker is reported to have said once to a famous brother preacher, in a frank and friendly chat about his work, 'you can't preach except on the anecdotes of the Bible. But,' he went on, 'there's a great deal in the Bible besides anecdotes. When Spurgeon first came to London, he took for his text, *He hath made us accepted in the Beloved*. Now,' said Parker, 'you wouldn't know what to make of a text like that.' God help the preacher who does not know what to make of the great texts of the Bible!

We see the same mundane temper, the same limitations of outlook, in the attempt that is made, sometimes from without, sometimes from within, to reduce the Church to a huge philanthropical society. It were far better, these busy, well-meaning ones tell us, to bow theology out at the back door and let in political economy and sociology at the front. A communion service is a faded bit of ritual, interesting enough in its way; but a meal to cripples or poor children sets us at once in the main stream of things. It is not, we are told, with irreverent smartness, 'a closer walk with God' that is needed so much as a

closer walk with man. 'To be a disciple of Christ,' says Dr. Lyman Abbott, 'is to learn from Him the laws of life. To be a believer in Christ is to believe in Him as the inspirer of life; to be a follower of Christ is to join with Him in fulfilling His mission as He Himself defined it. And how did He define it? By His teaching. And these teachings may all be summed up in one word—Helpfulness.'[1] There you have it in a nutshell: Christianity is helpfulness, and the Church a sort of society of boy scouts bent on doing their daily 'good turns.'[2]

Look again at some of our current interpretations of great biblical ideas. 'Sin,' we say, 'is selfishness.' So far as it goes the definition is perfectly true, but it has this serious defect: it leaves God out, and makes of sin a wholly man-regarding thing. 'Sin is selfishness'—that sets me among my fellows in the crowded streets of the world's busy life, and teaches me that sin is anti-social.

Against Thee, Thee only, have I sinned.
And done that which is evil in Thy sight—

that leaves me under the midnight sky with God looking on, my whole being bare to His touch. Which brings us nearer to the mystery's dark heart? So, too, in regard to the Atonement. In our revolt, our just and natural revolt, against the impossible because unethical theories of the past, the Cross has come to have for many to-day only a manward aspect; its efficacy, as Dr. Garvie puts it,

[1] Quoted by Professor G. A. Johnston Ross in the *Hibbert Journal*, April, 1911, p. 499.

[2] Let this not be interpreted as any reflection on a movement for which the writer has the warmest admiration.

is exhausted in its subjective effects, in its moral and religious impressiveness; it is a tragic spectacle addressed to human emotions.[1] Has, then, the Atonement no more of God in it than that? Most significant of all, perhaps, is our changed attitude towards the future. On that subject a great hush has fallen on the Christian world. Who hears to-day the sermons about heaven such as older men used to hear in their childhood? Who sings now the hymns in which the home-sickness of the soul once poured itself forth? Here again, the change is, in part at least, of the nature of a reaction; and we may think, and not be wholly wrong in thinking, that our silence is wiser than were our words. And yet is it well for us that we so rarely call in eternity, that we draw our motives and consolations so largely from the life that now is? Are we not, in a single word, coming perilously near 'making the experiment of how much religion is possible, and how much Christianity is possible, without God?'[2]

The foregoing paragraphs do not, of course, tell the whole truth; they call for many qualifications and exceptions; but they indicate, I believe, with general and sufficient accuracy, an unmistakable trend in the life and thought of the Church to-day. In part, as I have said, it is simply reaction—reaction inevitable and wholesome. It is also due —I do not pretend to be giving an exhaustive account of the matter—to an honourable desire to win for the Church and the gospel the interest of a generation that apparently cares little for either.

[1] *The Christian Certainty and the Modern Perplexity*, p. 41.

[2] 'Religion,' says the author of *Absente Reo*, 'may be defined as walking and talking with God; and we get true or false religion in proportion as God or man does most of the talking' (p. 15).

Let us, it is urged, give to the gospel its place in the visible and material order of things. Let us show men how it will help to solve their bread-and-butter problems. Let us interpret it to them in terms of the secular life—a living wage, shorter hours, healthier homes, kindlier and juster human relations. Let us do these things, and the very passion of men's desire for social betterment will gain for our message the hearing which now it so often asks in vain.

It is here that we need to pause and consider. 'Social Christianity' itself needs no defence. In large part it is simply the long overdue application of some of the plainest things in our Christian Scriptures. One point, however, we must press, in season and out of season, upon its advocates: that they keep it true to the accent, the emphasis, the proportion of Christ. It is always what we put first that matters. Men and systems are defined by what they reckon to be best rather than by what they admit to be good. I care little about the width of your circumference until I know from what centre you draw it. If, while frankly admitting and asserting the validity of temporal interests and relations, we insist on maintaining the primacy of the spiritual and eternal, all will be well: we may give the social gospel all the room it asks. But if we imagine that we can solve the problem of our decaying Churches by the easy expedient of shifting the emphasis from the spiritual to the temporal, we are only laying up for ourselves disappointment and vexation of spirit. As Dr. Denney truly says, the gospel wins by its magnitude.[1] Reduce it to a

[1] *The Death of Christ*, p. 309.

programme of social reform, make it anything less than what it is, and you so far weaken its appeal. Man is incurably religious, and, all appearances to the contrary notwithstanding, nothing interests him so deeply and permanently as religion. We are all bewailing just now the thinning of the ranks of the regular churchgoers; but is there any other subject which could draw together every week the vast multitudes who still gather for Christian worship? Our political interests are not wanting in keenness, but think of attending a political meeting in the same place, addressed by the same speaker, every seven days! Therefore, do not let us deceive ourselves. If religion will not fill our empty Churches, and keep them full, there is nothing that will. We are not wrong, we are wholly right, in seeking to remove stones out of the path of the prejudiced and the reluctant outsider—there is indeed nothing that some of our Churches need so much as a little wise inventiveness; but when the way has been prepared, and the outsider has come, unless we have something more to offer him than a few baptized frivolities—sacred concerts, short talks on current topics, and the like—it will not be long before he will seek out some new sensation, and our last state will be worse than the first. If I go to hear a lecture on astronomy, I do not want to be mocked with small jests and trivial anecdotes; I want to be shown the soundless depths where the stars repose. And when I go to church, though I may live in a mean street and within narrow walls, it is not of these I want to hear; I want to forget them if I can, while I look up to the heaven where God dwells.

The gospel wins by its magnitude: do not all the great preachers teach us this? *I delivered unto you first of all* (ἐν πρώτοις) *that which also I received, how that Christ died for our sins according to the scriptures* (1 Cor. xv. 3). Among the first things transmitted to the Corinthians were the fundamental facts of the Christian religion, the death and resurrection of Jesus in the significance which belonged to them *according to the scriptures.*[1] Very much has been written about Wesley's tireless industry, the number of miles he rode, the turnpikes he paid, the inns he lodged at, and so forth. But Wesley's industry would have accomplished little without Wesley's gospel. He conquered England, not by riding up and down in it, but by the glad tidings of great joy which he brought to it. The same is true of Spurgeon. All the world knows of his splendid natural gifts: the lambent humour, the strong, racy Saxon speech, the voice 'as clear as a silver bell, and as winning as a woman's.' But the secret of that amazing ministry does not lie among these things. A great soul mastered by a great gospel, glorying in it, awed by it, always awake to the wonder of it—it was this that kept the river of those forty years full of water. And yet again, though in a very different way, Newman's preaching tells the same tale. From first to last, in all manner of ways, his sermons, it has been said, 'are a protest, first against coldness, but even still more against meanness in religion . . . They have no tolerance for what makes religion little and poor and superficial, for what contracts its horizon and dwarfs its infinite greatness and vulgarizes its

[1] *The Death of Christ*, p. 301.

mystery.'[1] Always, no matter who the preacher may be, the gospel wins by its magnitude.

The great truths of religion greatly conceived—without this the first elements of greatness in preaching are wanting; and this, I repeat, is the only kind of preaching that can give any guarantee to morality. Religion, the world is never weary of telling the Church, is for use; like the great electric forces of nature, it must not only paint our skies with glowing crimsons and purples, it must light our streets and warm our homes. And religion, the Church must never weary of telling itself, cannot minister to these simple, human wants without the great divine facts and forces that are declared and revealed in the gospel. We cannot bring to perfection even the humblest wayside flower of the moral life without the sun and the rain and the dew from heaven. Celestial observations are needed in order to construct terrestrial charts; to steer the ship we must 'take the sun,' to solve the problems of the hour we must bring in the things of eternity. *God was in Christ reconciling the world unto Himself*: the old words may sound strangely remote from the programmes and policies which stir men's blood to-day; yet in them is the secret of our peace, the one sure anchor for all vexed and driven souls on life's wide, unquiet sea.

[1] I quote from Dean Church's essay, 'Newman's Parochial Sermons' (*Occasional Papers*, vol. ii., pp. 441-462). Perhaps nothing equal to it on Newman as a preacher has ever been written: see Dr. Whyte's enthusiastic tribute, *Newman: An Appreciation*, p. 39.

IV

THE PREACHER AND THE BIBLE

If I am asked why I receive Scripture as the Word of God, and as the only perfect rule of faith and life, I answer with all the fathers of the Protestant Church, 'Because the Bible is the only record of the redeeming love of God, because in the Bible alone I find God drawing near to man in Christ Jesus, and declaring to us, in Him, His will for our salvation. And this record I know to be true by the witness of His Spirit in my heart, whereby I am assured that none other than God Himself is able to speak such words to my soul.'

W. Robertson Smith.

For him [Luther] the great original certainty which attests all other truths, as it is not the authority of the Church, so also is not the authority of the canon of the Holy Scriptures handed down by the Church. It is rather the *subject-matter of the Word of God*, which, however different may be its forms of expression, is able to attest itself to the hearts of men as the Word of God by itself and its divine power.

A. Dorner.

CHAPTER IV

The Preacher and the Bible

With this chapter we approach the most difficult part of our task. In the foregoing pages I have been urging the claims of Christian truth, and the responsibility of the preacher for making it known. But this is the very thing, I may be told, which under existing conditions it is so difficult to do. Who knows what is Christian truth? How can the preacher be sure amid the prevailing uncertainty? The pew itself is not sure. It may be only dimly conscious of what is going on; it may be puzzled at its own inability to understand itself; but it knows all too well that somehow the old appeals, when it does hear them, do not evoke the old response. Under conditions like these, what is the preacher to do? Let us glance at one or two sections of the field in which the most recent and rapid changes have taken place, and let us see what readjustment in the preacher's message they call for, in order that it may win the mind of our day to the faith of the gospel. I can speak for one man at least who has felt something of the throes of the revolution to which his generation was born, and who has lost neither his faith as a Christian nor his joy as a preacher.

In this and the two following chapters I propose

to say something of the Preacher and the Bible, the Preacher and Miracle, the Preacher and Christ

I

In speaking of the Bible I shall not attempt even to summarize the recent results of biblical study. Any such summary as could be made here would be useless to those who know, and misleading to those who do not. Moreover, the main facts have of late been made so easily accessible to all that repetition is quite unnecessary; illustrations will be given as we proceed, and these for the moment must suffice. It may be well, however, to insist on the fact that there are assured results of modern biblical study. Christian scholarship has not been ploughing the sands of the seashore for a whole generation; it has garnered a rich harvest. The attempt is sometimes made by those who look with unsympathetic eyes on the present trend of biblical study to bring the whole critical movement into derision by pointing to the widely divergent views of some of its foremost advocates. But this is mere childishness. When a great body of men set out on the quest for truth, can anything be more certain than that some will move faster than others, or more probable than that one here and there will follow wandering fires and miss the trail altogether? But these things do not affect the findings of the main body of investigators. And neither the raw haste of some, nor the occasional wantonness of others, should blind us to the fact that over a very wide area the judgement of the biblical scholars of

both Britain and America is to-day a unit. If I am asked where these practically unanimous findings are recorded, I point again, as in a former chapter, to Hastings' *Dictionary of the Bible*, which, as Dr. Horton says, 'is the best authority we possess for the cautious conclusions and tested results which have been achieved in the last quarter of a century.'[1] When, therefore, in this chapter I speak of the assured results of modern biblical study, I mean generally such results as are set forth and illustrated in that great work.

What, then, should be the preacher's attitude to these, and what use should he make of them in his preaching? He is often told that he will do well to let them severely alone. 'The pulpit,' it is said, 'is no place for the discussion of critical theories; preach a positive gospel and give the critics a rest.' There is sound wisdom in the advice, nor are those who sympathize with the critics the only persons who might profit by it. To jeer at 'decomposition critics' and their 'patchwork Pentateuch,' and to substitute for the preaching of the gospel a lecture on the literary analysis of the Hexateuch or the Synoptic problem are alike forms of pulpit folly so unpardonable that one has no patience to consider which is the worse. If one goes to an art gallery, it is not to be shown the artist's pigments and palettes, nor to listen to the railings of some ignorant onlooker, but to see the pictures. And when one goes to church, what he expects from the preacher is the final results of his labour, not the intellectual processes by which he has reached them. As for the pulpit railer, he should be suppressed as promptly

[1] *The Bible a Missionary Book*, p. 10.

as he would be in the art gallery. At the same time it is impossible to accept the sentence of negative counsel which was quoted a moment ago as containing the whole duty of the preacher in relation to modern biblical study. It would be strange indeed if the patient, scholarly research of a generation had only left us with results which it were the wisdom of the pulpit to disregard.

To begin with, would it not be well for the preacher, on occasion, to explain to his people what 'Criticism' means, and what it is that 'the critics' are seeking to do? He should be especially careful to make it clear that the term does not stand for a number of more or less debatable conclusions, but for a particular method of study. Just as a student of archaeology, seeking to learn the age and history of some ancient ruin, interrogates each detail of its architecture; just as a student of science patiently deciphers the long story graven in the rocks; so does the modern biblical student seek by the free and reverent study of the biblical facts to learn from them the witness which the Bible bears to itself. And just as, again, the archaeologist does not hesitate to break with a tradition which analytical investigation and comparison show to be impossible; just as the geologist long ago parted with the old belief concerning the age of the world, because, as Charles Kingsley put it, he could not bring himself to believe that 'God had written on the rocks one enormous and superfluous lie,' so to-day the biblical student is sometimes compelled to challenge the traditional belief concerning the composition and the character of some ancient scripture, because all the facts of the document

itself cry out against it. The preacher who, without embarking on the stormy waters of controversy, would take pains to make this point clear, might do much to save his congregation from those gusty panics which still, at times, threaten the peace of the Church.

Further, the preacher should seek to obtain for himself and for his people such a point of view in his and their handling of the Bible as will give to them both perfect freedom in the face of all inquiry. The things by which the Bible lives, and in virtue of which it exercises authority over us, are not the things with which the critic deals ; he is as powerless to touch them as a sword to hack a sunbeam. Once these are real to us we can bid the critical inquiry go on its way without fear. I shall return to this point later ; meanwhile, let it be said, this is the only truly Protestant temper—and perhaps nothing would so much help in the solution of some of our present difficulties as a generous infusion of Luther's free spirit in those who so loudly boast the Protestant name. The trouble is, it is so much easier to praise a great man than to understand him.

Above all, the preacher must learn how to make use of the results of the critics' labours. In doing this it will rarely be necessary to 'talk criticism' in the pulpit. As a rule, it will be sufficient, in his interpretation of Scripture, to assume the modern point of view and go ahead. If he has mastered the first principles of the art of putting things, the results will usually be such that, so far from awakening hostility, they will commend themselves by their inherent reasonableness, and by

the relief which they will bring to many perplexed minds. There is, indeed, a very widespread idea that the general effect of the recent study of the Bible has been to make it much less usable by the preacher than heretofore. 'Modern criticism,' Dr. George Adam Smith once declared in a famous though not perhaps very happy phrase, 'has won its war against the traditional theories. It only remains to fix the amount of the indemnity.'[1] But, as Dr. Garvie asks, would it not be more fit and just to say that we may now calculate the dividend?[2] Without, however, attempting anything so ambitious as either calculating the dividend or fixing the indemnity — whichever be the more appropriate metaphor—we may devote this chapter to noting a few of the losses and counterbalancing gains on which the preacher may reckon who adopts in his public use of the Scriptures the point of view illustrated by Hastings' *Dictionary of the Bible*. If what seems a somewhat disproportionate number of my examples be drawn from the Old Testament, the explanation is that the Gospels will come up for consideration again in later chapters.

II

1. At the outset, the modern point of view implies, it need hardly be said, the definite abandonment of the older views of biblical inspiration and infallibility. There are still a few who are bravely

[1] *Modern Criticism and the Preaching of the Old Testament*, p. 72.

[2] *The Christian Certainty and the Modern Perplexity*, p. 33.

seeking to navigate the broken water of the twentieth century in the old craft, and there are a few others who think that if she were docked for repairs she might once more be made seaworthy; but most of us know that we shall never sail in her again, and that there is nothing now to do but to leave her to her fate. Indeed, at the present moment, it appears as if the Church were making up its mind to do without any doctrine of inspiration at all, or, if it retain one, to keep it as far in the rear as formerly it was thrust to the fore. Our modern theological text-books give comparatively little space to the subject, and all of them agree that it is in no sense fundamental. 'The Bible,' says Dr. Newton Clarke, 'is inspired as it is inspired, and not as we may think it ought to be inspired.'[1] And if to any one this sound an oracle obvious and empty, leading no whither, I will ask him to think again, and he will see that it sums up with admirable precision the difference between the old and the new in our way of thinking about the Bible. Formerly, we began with inspiration[2]; we constructed a theory of it largely out of our own heads, and then proceeded to read the Scriptures in the light of it.

[1] *Sixty Years with the Bible*, p. 133.

[2] Just at the time when my old professor, Dr. Joseph Agar Beet, was appointed to the chair of theology in Richmond College, he published in the *Expositor* a short series of papers on 'The Aim, Importance, Difficulties, and Best Methods of Systematic Theology.' Naturally enough, he declined to make inspiration one of the foundation stones of his theological system. Indeed, he expressly declared that a special advantage of the mode of study he suggested was 'that it does not imply that the Bible is infallible, but treats the various documents of the New Testament simply as human compositions, and tests their credentials as we should those of any other writings' (*Expositor*, Third Series, vol. i., p. 372). But I remember that he was rather severely taken to task by Dr. Benjamin Gregory, then editor of the *Wesleyan Methodist Magazine*, for his deviation from the recognized path of theological study

Now we are content to take the Bible as it is; we let it speak for itself, and if we get a doctrine of inspiration at all, we get it, not at the beginning, but at the end of our study, 'the last conclusion to which experience of the truth of Scripture leads.'[1]

This is, undoubtedly, a great change, and, rightly understood, it is also for the preacher a great gain. As Dr. Denney well says, the greatness and power of Scripture are most free to work when we approach it without any presuppositions whatever. 'The less we ask beforehand from those whom we wish to read it, the better. Words which provoke antipathy and disputation, like authority, infallibility, inerrancy, and so forth, had better be let alone by the preacher.'[2] Let him bring the message of the Bible home to men's business and bosoms; let him feel himself, and make others feel, the divine power and life that are in it, and it will need none of our doctrinal defences, it will vindicate itself. If God be in the book, as He is in no other, the best and only final demonstration of the fact lies in letting men hear Him. If, after they have heard Him, they are interested in considering how He got there, by all means let them set to work; but let the preacher know well that no difficult theory lies between him and the offer to every man of truth which each may receive and verify for himself.

2. Closely allied with the question of biblical inspiration is that of biblical authority—though on this point, important as it is, my words must be even fewer. The position, in brief, may be stated

[1] Denney's *Atonement and the Modern Mind*, p. 9.
[2] *Studies in Theology*, p. 227.

thus: the authority of the Bible for the modern mind is not really weakened, but it is differently conceived. We no longer believe that a biblical statement is necessarily true simply because it is a biblical statement, or that it is possible to settle a moot point in history or science by the short and easy method of quoting a text. We have come to recognize that there is a vast region of things in which there is and can be no such thing as authority. The authorship of a particular psalm, the literary character of a book of the Old Testament, for example, are not questions that can be determined out of hand by the words of an Apostle; they cannot be determined, with all reverence be it said, by the words of Jesus Himself. The only authority here is the authority of the facts; and if these are not decisive, nothing remains for us but to confess our ignorance. And this is not, as Dr. Denney says, the sin of the mind, it is but its nature and essence. 'Once the mind has come to know itself, there can be no such thing for it as blank authority.'[1] Similarly, when we speak of the authority of the Bible in the realm of the moral and spiritual, what we really mean is not the authority of a book or a messenger, but of the truth which they bring to us. The authority of the Bible is not like that of an official document, known to be authoritative because of the seal affixed to it; rather, it lies in the nature of the truth which it brings, and in the response which it evokes. 'Truth, in short, is the only thing which has authority for the mind, and the only way in which truth finally evinces its authority is by taking possession

[1] *The Atonement and the Modern Mind*, pp. 7–8.

of the mind for itself. It may be that any given truth can only be reached by testimony—that is, can only come to us by some historical channel; but if it is a truth of eternal import, if it is a part of a revelation of God, the reception of which is eternal life, then its authority lies in itself and in its power to win the mind, and not in any witness however trustworthy.'[1] Now, admittedly, this is not exactly what our fathers meant by the authority of the Bible. It is not what many Christians still mean by it. The Bible is for them a book with the red seal of authority stamped upon its cover, equally and divinely certificated throughout. It is impossible to discuss the matter further now; I only wish to insist that biblical authority is neither less real nor less preachable when it is conceived in the way I have tried to suggest.

3. Perhaps the most obvious changes in the modern use of Scripture are due to the introduction of more scientific methods of exegesis. The whole tendency of recent years has been to make exegesis historical instead of dogmatic; and thus, at one stroke, the theologian and the preacher alike have been robbed of many of their old textual stays. In this matter we have been compelled to disregard some of the methods of interpretation adopted even by New Testament writers in their use of the Old. For example, though we may never have actually said it to ourselves, we recognize at once its truth when it is said by another that many of the fulfilments of prophecy referred to in the First Gospel have for us neither intellectual

[1] *The Atonement and the Modern Mind*, p. 8.

nor religious value.[1] A little ingenuity might quite easily discover other references to Christ in the Old Testament of the kind that Matthew has furnished, but no expositor to-day would think of searching for them; our minds obstinately refuse to move along that path. In the same way no modern theologian would dream of fortifying his conclusions by heaping together a number of proof-texts in the fashion we find, for example, in Rom. iii. 10–18. St. Paul sometimes quotes the Old Testament with entire disregard for the original context, and even puts into its words a meaning exactly opposite to that which they originally possessed.[2] In one well-known reference—to the muzzling of the ox which treads out the corn, 1 Cor. ix. 9—it is impossible to avoid the feeling that the Apostle has quite failed to do justice to the tender humanitarianism which inspired the passage he is quoting, and which was so marked a feature of the Deuteronomic code.[3] And in this respect only a preacher with a bad exegetical conscience would take St. Paul for his example. I hasten to say, however, that all this in no way diminishes the reverent regard which we owe to the writers of the New Testament; least of all does it entitle us to 'put on airs' and 'talk down' to them as to our intellectual inferiors. It simply means that we and they were born heirs to a different intellectual inheritance, that they, like ourselves, must needs use the literary

[1] See Denney's *Jesus and the Gospel*, p. 62; also *Dictionary of Christ and the Gospels*, vol. ii., p. 95.

[2] See a valuable note on 'St. Paul's Use of the Old Testament' in Sanday and Headlam's *Romans* (International Critical Commentary), p. 302; and Gilbert's *Interpretation of the Bible*, chap. iii.

[3] See George Adam Smith's *Modern Criticism and the Preaching of the Old Testament*, p. 19, footnote.

forms and methods which the time rendered available; and, further, that we to-day, in reading what they wrote, must learn to distinguish the temporary from the eternal, the accidental from the essential. Thus the abiding truth which Matthew's Gospel labours to set forth is 'that the whole divine intention which pervades the ancient revelation has been consummated at last, and that the consummation is Jesus'[1]; and it is to this, not to the inadequate form through which it finds expression, that our thought should be directed. And in reading St. Paul it is only an incurable perversity that can make so much of the occasionally impossible exegesis as to miss the profound spiritual realities which are everywhere struggling for utterance.

Nevertheless, one of the first duties of the preacher to-day is to cultivate at all costs an exegetical conscience. He owes it to himself, he owes it to his people, above all he owes it to the book which he is set to expound, to deal honestly with it in the light of the best helps to its understanding which are within his reach. He has no right to read into its words a meaning which it is his business to know they cannot bear. And yet really truthful exegesis, Dr. A. B. Davidson once declared, is one of the rarest things to meet. 'Many sermons bear witness to the brilliancy, the thoughtfulness, or even to the laboriousness in certain directions, of their authors, but comparatively few give any evidence of a patient study of Scripture in its connexion.'[2] One would like to think that all

[1] *Jesus and the Gospel*, p. 62.

[2] *Expositor*, third series, vol. iv., p. 292.

preachers, at least all under fifty years of age, have given up trying to find the doctrine of the Trinity in the first chapter of Genesis,[1] or the doctrine of 'total depravity' in the words of Isaiah, *The whole head is sick and the whole heart faint.* Most of us know now, thanks to the Revised Version, that 'Almost persuaded' must be struck off the list of the evangelist's available texts; but how much longer will it be, one wonders, before we shall be able to get through an evangelistic mission without the missioner declaring that God's Spirit *will not always strive with man* under the impression that he is quoting Scripture?[2] Even so great a scholar as the late Dean Church preached a Christmas sermon on 'The Desire of all Nations,' using the prophet's phrase as his text without apparently a momentary consciousness of the fact that grammar and context alike peremptorily forbid the interpretation.[3] An admirable little volume of apologetics

[1] It may give pause to some of those who persist in seeking to prove New Testament doctrines from Old Testament texts to learn that not the least probable of the many explanations which have been offered of the plural in *Let us make man in our image, after our likeness* (Gen. i. 26), is that it is a bit of the primitive unpurged polytheism of the ancient tradition from which the form of the Hebrew narrative is derived. This is the view to which Dr. Skinner inclines in his recent volume on Genesis in the International Critical Commentary; see p. 31. The doctrine of the Trinity, he rightly adds, is entirely unknown to the Old Testament, and cannot be implied here.

[2] The words quoted above are to be found in Gen. vi. 3. Without attempting an exposition of this difficult verse, for which reference may be made to any good commentary, such as Driver's or Skinner's, it is sufficient for my immediate purpose to point out, first, that, as Dr. Driver says, both textually and exegetically the verse is very uncertain, and that it is impossible to feel any confidence as to its meaning; and secondly, that, however we translate it, 'my spirit' does not and cannot mean the Holy Spirit, the third person in the Trinity, nor, as the context shows, is the saying even remotely connected with the subject with which in the popular mind it is so often associated.

[3] Hag. ii. 7. The Revised Version renders *The desirable things of all nations shall come.* What these are is indicated by the words of the following verse: *The silver is Mine, and the gold is Mine, saith the*

recently issued, written by the son of an Archbishop, and the head master of one of our English public schools, quotes Job as saying, *though He slay me, yet will I trust in Him.* Can it be that the writer does not know that Job never said anything in the least degree like this?[1] Perhaps the most glaring misapplication of Scripture that I can recall occurred in a terrific sermon on Future Punishment by Dr. Talmage. The sermon closed in this fashion: 'Who among us shall dwell with the devouring fire? Who among us shall dwell with everlasting burnings? Who? Who?' If the preacher had bridled his rhetoric for a moment while he consulted his Bible, he would have found that the words which follow, and which answer the question are these: *He that walketh righteously and speaketh uprightly; he that despiseth the gain of oppressions.* The 'everlasting burnings' refers of course not to the hell of the preacher's imagination, but to the fire of Jehovah's holiness.[2]

It will be said, perhaps, that such misuse of Scripture is, after all, a very harmless thing; the misapplied texts are not used to teach false doctrine, but only to enforce truth for which there is Scripture

Lord of hosts. Church's sermon referred to in the text is to be found in the posthumous volume *The Message of Peace*, published by the S.P.C.K.

[1] The translation of Job xiii. 15 is uncertain owing to the uncertainty of the text. One thing is certain, however, and that is the impossibility of the familiar rendering of the Authorized Version. Job's attitude, as the context plainly shows, is one not of patient submissiveness but of bold defiance. Following the margin of the Revised Version we may render: *Behold, He will slay me; I wait for Him; nevertheless I will maintain my ways before Him.* 'Job anticipates that his boldness in going before God to defend his ways will provoke God to destroy him, and he says he waits for His destroying blow, nevertheless he will defend his own ways' (A. B. Davidson).

[2] Isa. xxxiii. 14, 15.

somewhere or other. The plea is wholly insufficient. If a passage does not mean what we, by our use of it, are making it mean, we are guilty of a form of intellectual dishonesty. To most of those to whom we speak the words of Scripture come weighted with peculiar authority, and therefore we are the more bound to see to it that we do not, through ignorance or carelessness, or for the sake of what we think a more apt and telling application of the truth, make an illegitimate use of them. If we err through ignorance, we are still to blame, for it is the preacher's first duty to know his Bible; if through thinking that inaccuracy in such matters is of small account, then let us tell ourselves plainly that habits of intellectual honesty and sincerity, the sincerity of a man with himself, are as essential to all worthy work in the pulpit as anywhere else. Nor is it ourselves alone whom our carelessness may hurt. Our scamped work may pass undetected by the many; but do we owe nothing to the unhappy few who know? As Dr. Davidson says, it is the bad quarter of an hour which our slipshod ways give to them which sometimes drives the wretched men to exclaim that if they perish it is going to church that will be their undoing.[1]

4. Our ancient freedom in the use of texts is challenged in yet another way. Is it not manifest that these isolated fragments of Scripture are destined to play—are already playing—a much less prominent part in the thinking of religious men than they have done in the past? Our exegesis of an individual verse may be unimpeachably accurate; we may have given to the words as they

[1] See article quoted above.

stand as nearly as is possible the meaning which the writer meant them to convey ; and yet, for various reasons, the verse may be inconclusive, and our use of it questionable. The subject is a very wide one, and for the sake of greater definiteness I will confine my illustrations of it to the sayings of Jesus as they are reported in the four Gospels. Let me say at once, and with all possible emphasis, what I shall have occasion to repeat at greater length later on, that, so far as I am able to judge, the net result of the fierce conflict which has raged for the last seventy-five years around the New Testament documents has been to make clearer than ever the solidity of the historical basis of Christianity and the incomparable position of Christ as the supreme Person of history. At the same time it is no longer possible to use the four Gospels quite as our fathers used them, and the preacher must prepare himself for the conclusion, now generally accepted by New Testament scholars, that Jesus Himself is not directly the author of every saying, at least in its present form, which the Gospels attribute to Him. 'All our criticism of the four evangelists who report Jesus,' says Matthew Arnold, 'has this for its governing idea: to make out what, in their report of Jesus, is Jesus, and what is the reporters.'[1] Some will no doubt feel that the distinction is a very hazardous one, and that it opens the door to almost unlimited guess-work. Nor is the fear groundless, as the history of criticism only too plainly shows. Nevertheless, it is impossible to deny the validity of the distinction ; it is forced upon us by the facts of the Gospels themselves.

[1] *God and the Bible*, p. 96.

All that we can do—and this it is our duty to do—is to insist on the utmost caution in its use, and to seek to correct the errors of criticism by a truer application of its own principles.

It appears undeniable, then—and save on the most unyielding theories of inspiration it is surely not incredible—that the reporters of Jesus sometimes misunderstood Him. Only on this supposition, many reverent expositors think, is it possible to find a path through the tangled thicket of Christ's recorded sayings concerning the Last Things.[1]

Or, take the saying, reported in varying forms in the first three Gospels and given thus by St. Mark: *And when He was alone, they that were about Him with the twelve asked of Him the parables. And He said unto them, Unto you is given the mystery of the kingdom of God; but unto them that are without, all things are done in parables: that seeing they may see, and not perceive; and hearing they may hear and not understand; lest haply they should turn again, and it should be forgiven them* (iv. 10-12).

Did Jesus really say this? If He did, the words create a difficulty concerning the purpose of the parables which but for them would not have existed;

[1] Cp., for example, Mr. L. A. Muirhead's *Eschatology of Jesus*: 'There are probably no ancient reports in the world so manifestly objective and veracious as the Synoptic Gospels. Certainly, in these qualities none excels them. But every quality has its defects. The defects of the supremely accurate reporter is, that while he never consciously misrepresents, he sometimes unconsciously misunderstands. It is to me as certain as any fact in history that the Evangelists sometimes and inevitably misunderstood Jesus. Perhaps they never really misreported a sentence taken by itself. Perhaps they understand all that He judged it possible to convey to their minds. Still, I would stake the entire worth of this investigation upon the assertion that they did not understand fully and therefore partially misunderstood the mind of Jesus, in reference to the Kingdom of God. They misunderstood, in particular, His way of thinking and speaking about its consummation' (p. 35).

for they seem to say that Christ adopted the parabolic method in order to hide the truths of the kingdom from unspiritual minds. Yet such a purpose would be entirely at variance with the whole spirit of His ministry. Many explanations of the difficulty have been offered, but on the whole none so likely as that the reporters of Jesus misunderstood Him. And if there be no other way out, we shall all agree with Dr. A. B. Bruce that it were much better to impute a mistake to them than an inhuman purpose to Christ.[1]

Again, there are certain of the sayings of Jesus which owe at least something of their form to the later experience and reflection of the Church. A single example must suffice to illustrate what is meant. The first Gospel reports Jesus as saying: *If ye then, being evil, know how to give good gifts unto your children, how much more shall your Father which is in heaven give good things to them that ask Him*? (vii. 11). The third Gospel gives the same saying in almost identical terms, but substitutes *Holy Spirit* for *good things* (xi. 13). What, then, was the original form of the saying? Since we seem compelled to make our choice, are we not almost certainly right in concluding that *good things* was the phrase that Jesus used, and that we owe St. Luke's form of the saying to a somewhat later date in the Church's history when, largely through the influence of Pauline doctrine, the gift of the Holy

[1] *Expositor's Greek Testament*, vol. i., p. 196. 'It is evident,' says Professor W. J. Moulton, of Bangor, 'that the statements [quoted above] cannot be attributed to Jesus in their most obvious meaning.' 'We have to do in this passage,' he thinks, 'with a saying of Jesus that, in the course of time, has been modified, or received a false emphasis.' 'There is, in any case,' he concludes, 'too much contradictory evidence to admit of our receiving them as the deliberate statement of Jesus' intention' (*Dictionary of Christ and the Gospels*, vol. ii., pp. 315, 316).

Spirit had come to be regarded as the summing up of all God's best gifts to His Church? In other words, what Luke gives us is, as Dr. Bruce says, 'in all probability a comment on what Christ said rather than an exact report of His precise words.'[1]

It is when we turn to the fourth Gospel that the problem of distinguishing between Jesus and His reporters presents itself in its most imperative and difficult form. The essential facts, which are, of course, known to every one, are stated with characteristic incisiveness by Dr. Denney: 'There is only one style in the Gospel from beginning to end, and every one speaks in it—John the Baptist, Jesus, the evangelist himself. There is only one mode of thought represented in it from beginning to end, and every one shares it—John the Baptist, Jesus, the evangelist himself.'[2] Take, for example, the familiar third chapter of the Gospel. It opens with a conversation between Jesus and Nicodemus, and it glides without a break into what is apparently the evangelist's comment on the words of Jesus. But precisely where the dividing line runs no one can positively say. The revisers, following Westcott, mark the division at the end of the fifteenth verse, and so make the great saying, *God so loved the world*, the comment of the disciple rather than the word of the Master. Could there be a more signal illustration of the nature of the difficulties which this Gospel presents? 'The Jesus who speaks in its pages is not only the Jesus who taught

[1] *The Kingdom of God*, p. 17. So also Dr. Denney: 'This is a clear case of later experience interpreting the words of Jesus and giving the sense of them in its own terms' (*Dictionary of Christ and the Gospels*, vol. i., p. 335).

[2] *Jesus and the Gospel*, p. 87.

in the synagogues and fields of Galilee, or in the temple courts and streets of Jerusalem, but also the exalted Lord whose spirit vivifies and interprets the memories of Jesus in the heart of an intimate, devoted, and experienced disciple.'[1]

Facts such as these, it cannot be denied, have added a new element of perplexity to the preacher's task. They call him to the exercise of a difficult discrimination. It is no longer possible to use a text—any text, every text—at its face value; it must be first appraised, and perhaps discounted before it can be offered as legal tender. And this involves for the preacher a certain loss—loss of freedom, loss of confidence, loss of strength. But the loss, if loss indeed it be, is only temporary. Let the preacher be patient with himself, let him quietly take his bearings afresh, and it will not be long before he discovers that what he has lost in one way is fully made up to him in another. It is not really hurtful, it is good for us that we should be compelled no longer to put our trust in texts, but to seek our knowledge of the divine purpose over the broad spaces and larger areas of divine revelation.

Look, for example, at the biblical argument for Missions. Every student of the Gospels is aware of the doubts which of recent years have been cast on the Great Commission recorded in the closing verses of our first Gospel. Scholars like Dr. A. B. Bruce and Dr. James Moffatt see in it a summary of what the Apostolic Church understood to be the will of the exalted Lord, rather than a report of what the risen Jesus said to His disciples at a

[1] *Jesus and the Gospel*, p. 87.

given time and place.[1] Their arguments do not convince me; I still think we are justified in ascribing to Christ Himself at least the substance of the great charge. But suppose it were not so; suppose that we were driven to admit that there was no sufficient evidence that Jesus Himself anticipated the world-wide preaching of His gospel—what then? I venture to affirm that the strength of the biblical argument would remain essentially what it is. The two or three overworked missionary texts to which we have pinned our faith are, after all, no more than the fringe of that argument, and though we should lose them altogether, the argument itself would be substantially unaffected. It is not a stray text here or there, it is the very nature of the truth made known to us in the gospel which commits us to the missionary enterprise. Because Christianity is what it is, because Christ is what He is, we cannot keep Him or it to ourselves alone. The very make of the gospel, if one may so put it, declares that it is as much for everybody as it is for anybody. Even if Jesus had never in so many words uttered the Great Commission, it is implied in all He said and did and was. And what better thing could befal the missionary cause than that its advocates should find themselves pushed out of their tiny textual creeks into the wide open sea of divine truth? Therefore, let the preacher be of good cheer; he may lose some of his texts, he need never lose his gospel.

[1] See *Expositor's Greek Testament*, vol. i., p. 340; Bruce's *Apologetics*, p. 463, and Moffatt's *Historical New Testament*, p. 648. For a fuller discussion of the whole subject reference may be made to an article by the present writer, 'The Missionary Idea in the Gospels' (*Expository Times*, Nov., 1911).

5. It is probably in the field of history, and especially of early Old Testament history, that the preacher regards with most serious misgiving the results of modern biblical research. It is now more than twenty years since Bishop Gore startled many of the readers of *Lux Mundi* by the assertion that 'the Church cannot *insist upon* the historical character of the earliest records of the ancient Church in detail.'[1] If the Bishop were to write to-day with equal frankness, he would probably think it necessary to widen still further the area of historical uncertainty.[2] But let us not exaggerate. The main outlines and general course of Israel's history we do really know; we know them as we know those of our own or of any other country. And, as Dr. George Adam Smith has pointed out, in a summary which I shall not attempt still further to summarize, even when the possible worst is faced, the amount of the history and narrative which criticism has rendered uncertain is by no means so great as is often feared.[3] Indeed, there are whole stretches of Old Testament history which criticism not only does not and cannot take away, but across which the preacher to-day 'may move with all the confidence and boldness of his fathers—nay, with more freshness, more insight, more agility, for the text is clearer, the discrepancies explained, the allusions better understood, and all the old life re-quickened,

[1] p. 352.

[2] 'The mere admission that the early chapters of Genesis cannot be regarded as historical is wholly inadequate. We must allow a method whose validity we have once recognized to put the whole literature through the most searching scrutiny.' (Professor A. S. Peake in a paper read before the Fourth Oecumenical Methodist Council; see *Proceedings*, p. 241.)

[3] *Modern Criticism and the Preaching of the Old Testament*, p. 77.

out of which those prophets and reformers, those psalmists and wise men with all their literature, originally sprang.'[1] What, then, are some of the facts with which the preacher must reckon in his use of Old Testament history?

In the first place, it is necessary to remember that the truth of Old Testament history can be established, like the truth of any other history, only by its own proper evidence. Hebrew history has, indeed, a significance which belongs to no other history; but this does not exempt it from the recognized tests of historical credibility. In so far as it can satisfy these, we owe it our assent; where it fails, it is just as much an intellectual duty to say that it fails as it would be if we were studying Greek or Roman history. Historical statements must be historically demonstrated; if the evidence is insufficient we are only mistaking the nature of our own minds by supposing that they can be coerced into belief by an appeal to something that we call 'inspiration.'

It follows from what has just been said that we must learn to recognize varying degrees of historical trustworthiness in the Old Testament. Of many things, of the main things, in Hebrew history we can be as certain as we are of the great deeds of Queen Elizabeth's reign. But behind this period of certainty there lies a period in which certainty and uncertainty mingle in proportions which we shall probably never be able precisely to determine. Take, for example, the narrative contained in the Pentateuch. It undoubtedly preserves traditions of a long distant past, but it is not history in the

[1] *Modern Criticism and the Preaching of the Old Testament*, p. 86.

modern and scientific sense of the word; it is not history as the Book of Kings is history. And if the question be asked why the distinction is made, the answer is very simple: the Book of Kings is largely made up of verbal extracts from older written sources, and has practically the value of a contemporary document. In the case of the Pentateuch, however, there is a gulf of centuries between the earliest written records from which it was compiled and the events which it relates. When we get back to the age of the patriarchs, the gulf has widened into a millennium. To a writing composed under such circumstances, it is manifestly impossible to ascribe a strictly historical character. 'In such a case,' says Dr. Sanday, 'we should expect to happen just what we find has happened. There is an element of *folklore*, of oral tradition insufficiently checked by writing. The imagination has been at work.' Compare, for example, the narrative of the Ten Plagues with the narrative of the revolt of Absalom, and we feel the difference at once. 'The one is nature itself, with all the flexibility and easy sequence that we associate with Nature. The other is constructed upon a scheme which is so symmetrical that we cannot help seeing that it is really artificial. I do not mean artificial in the sense that the writer, with no materials before him, sat down consciously and deliberately to invent them in the form which they now have; but I mean that, as the story passed from mouth to mouth, it gradually and almost imperceptibly assumed its present shape.'[1]

[1] From a chapter entitled 'The Symbolism of the Bible' in *The Life of Christ in Recent Research*, p. 18. At the same time the earliest

The distinction of the foregoing paragraph may be made still clearer by a reference to our earliest English historian, the Venerable Bede. All that we really know, says John Richard Green, of the century and a half that follow the landing of Augustine we know from him.[1] Now between the landing of Augustine and the birth of Bede there is an interval of only some seventy-five years. Suppose, however, that the earliest written sources to which Bede had had access had been separated from the events which they describe by a period of from four to fourteen centuries, with what different feelings would the student to-day have turned the pages of the *Ecclesiastical History*!

Again, it is necessary in our reading of the Old Testament to distinguish between history properly so called and what has been named 'Symbolical History' or 'Historical Symbolism.' The phrases are Dr. Sanday's, and we may allow him to expound and illustrate what we mean by them. 'Symbolism'

narrative contained in the book of Exodus, as Dr. Driver says, 'cannot but embody substantial elements of fact. That the ancestors—or *some* of the ancestors—of the later Israelites were for long settled in Egypt, and, in the end, subjected there to hard bondage; that Moses was the leader who, after much opposition on the part of the Pharaoh, rescued them from their thraldom at a time when Egypt was paralysed by an unprecedented succession of national calamities, and led them through a part of the Red Sea usually covered with water beyond reach of their recent oppressors; that he brought them afterwards to a mountain where Israel received through him a revelation which was a new departure in the national religion, and became the foundation both of the later religion of Israel, and of Christianity; that he originated, or, more probably adapted, customs and institutions from which the later civil and religious organization of the nation was developed; and that thus Israel owed to Moses both its national existence and, ultimately, its religious character,—these, and other facts such as these, cannot be called in question by a reasonable criticism. Moses, in particular, bulks too largely in the Pentateuchal narratives to be anything but a historical person, of whose life and character many trustworthy traditions were preserved' (*Exodus*, Cambridge Bible, p. xliv.).

[1] *Short History of the English People*, p. 40.

he defines as 'indirect description'; in other words 'it is description or expression by a system of equivalents, in which the terms or media employed do not at once call up the features of the object, but rather suggest them by calling up the features of some other object like that which it is sought to describe, or which is treated as like it, and for the moment is taken to stand for it.' Such symbolism will be used most naturally in describing that which it is difficult or impossible to describe directly; 'such as the nature of God or of spiritual things, of which the mind cannot form any picture as they really are, but can at most suggest them.' So much by way of definition. Now for illustration. Let us take the story of the giving of the law from Mount Sinai. 'First of all, I conceive that Moses, when he gave Israel the judgements and decisions that formed the first nucleus of the Pentateuchal Code, did so solemnly in God's name, with something very like the prophetic formula, "Thus saith the Lord," and with the full assurance that he really was commissioned to speak by and for the Almighty. In this way the little nucleus of fundamental laws and institutions left by Moses came to be regarded—and not wrongly regarded—as so much divine legislation. And then the imagination played round the idea of divine legislation and invested it with what seemed more adequate circumstances of solemnity and sanctity.' And since the thunder-storm was considered to be a special manifestation of God's presence and the thunder was God's voice, 'nothing could be more natural than that the words should be represented as coming out of the storm, with *thunders and lightnings, and a thick*

cloud upon the mount, and the voice of a trumpet exceeding loud (Exod. xix. 16). . . . These are just poetic accessories, emblematic of the central fact that the words proceeded from God. The literal truth was that God spoke to the heart of Moses: the poetic truth was that He spoke in thunder and lightning from the crest of Sinai.'[1] And there can be no doubt that symbolism of this kind pervades the whole Bible to a much greater extent than many of its readers have yet realized or allowed for. We prosaic Westerners, with our stubborn common sense and matter-of-fact ways, which turn the gossamer threads of fancy into the steel cords of fact, seem born to misunderstand a book which comes to us steeped in the sunshine and poetry of the East. Is it any exaggeration to say that one half of the blunders that we make about the Bible are due to sheer want of imagination?

Once more, and again very briefly, we have to distinguish between history and the religious interpretation of history. A very simple illustration will serve to make clear what is meant. In 2 Sam. xxiv. 1, we read *The anger of the Lord was kindled against Israel, and He moved David against them, saying, Go, number Israel and Judah.* The author of Chronicles, however, tells us that *Satan moved David to number Israel* (1 Chron. xxi. 1). How shall we explain the difference? In this way: the fact which lies behind the twofold statement of Scripture is this—David numbered Israel. But each writer interprets the act in his own way. The earlier, after the fashion of the primitive religion of Israel,

[1] See the chapter quoted above.

which quite frankly ascribes even morally pernicious acts to the direct agency of God, attributes David's deed to Jehovah ; the later, shrinking with man's growing reverence and keener moral sensitiveness from making God the author of moral evil, throws the responsibility on Satan.[1] And this is but an illustration on a small scale of what meets us everywhere throughout Old Testament history. It is not history simply, it is history with an interpretation. Its authors belong, to speak technically, to the didactic rather than the narrative class of historians, to the school of Thucydides rather than of Herodotus. Their aim is not so much to tell us what happened as to emphasize for us the lesson of what happened.[2]

This distinction between historical fact and religious idea cuts very deep. It relieves us at once from all obligation to attribute to God all the traits and judgements that are attributed to Him within the Bible.[3] Things that our fathers supposed to be true of God, and which they laboured hard to reconcile with His character, we now see to be simply a record of men's thoughts of Him when as yet His ways were but dimly understood. When, for example, we read (2 Sam. xxi.) that because of an unavenged wrong committed by Saul against the Gibeonites, God sent three years' famine upon Israel, and that not until Saul's seven innocent sons had been sacrificed would He be *entreated for the*

[1] See W. H. Bennett's *Chronicles* (Expositor's Bible), pp. 288 seq.

[2] See Skinner's *Kings* (Century Bible), p. 5. The narrative, or descriptive, type of history is, of course, to be found in the Old Testament. The best illustration is the great section 2 *Samuel* ix.–xx.

[3] W. N. Clarke's *Sixty Years with the Bible*, p. 232.

land and stay the famine—when, I say, we read things like these, must we take them as sober fact? If we must, I confess frankly, I do not know what answer is possible to the coarse jibes of a Bradlaugh or an Ingersoll. But this is not history; it is the interpretation of history; it is the reflection, the truthful reflection, of how men thought in the world's dim dawn, a thousand years before Christ came. The relief which this distinction brings to the preacher who sometimes finds himself puzzled to explain difficult Old Testament narratives to thoughtful young people in his congregation needs not to be pointed out. It is enough to say, with Dr. Newton Clarke, that we are now as free to call black black as we are to call white white, and we are delivered from the too familiar temptation to call black white for the glory of God.[1]

III

Reviewing now the course of our somewhat discursive discussion, two or three points remain to be briefly emphasized.

And, first of all, let us bring no railing accusation against the scholars whose conclusions we dislike. The facts for which they are seeking to account are not theirs, nor are they responsible for them; they are responsible only for the painstaking and unprejudiced study of them. If their reading of the facts is at fault, it can be corrected, but the correction can only come from a scholarship more faithful to the facts than their own. Thus, for example,

[1] *Sixty Years with the Bible*, p. 233.

by the practically unanimous finding of Old Testament students to-day, the book of Daniel is declared to be an imaginative tale embodying historical traditions, written for the encouragement of persecuted Jews some four hundred years later than the events to which it refers. This conclusion, so unwelcome to many minds, is not to be put down to a fit of intellectual wilfulness on the part of modern biblical scholarship; it is based on the patient and minute study of the book itself, and it will continue to hold the field until it is driven off by some other theory which can more adequately explain all the facts. The lamentations or anathemas of preachers who imagine themselves despoiled of a few favourite texts avail nothing.

There is a further point to be kept in mind. Historical statements, it has been said already, must be historically demonstrated. What if the evidence be indecisive? Truth demands, of course, that we cherish no presuppositions that render our minds inaccessible to any part of it. But if, when all the witnesses have been fully heard, the case is still incomplete, what then? Well, Christianity calls for no illegitimate intellectual processes. Men may have been willing once to believe in the absence of evidence, and even counted it a virtue to do so, but that day is for ever past. As Dr. Sanday says, we are modern men, and we cannot, if we would, divest ourselves of our modernity. And if there is one thing which it is vain to ask the modern man to do, it is to believe without proof. If, therefore, concerning some portions of biblical history, certainty is not attainable, we are surely right in concluding that neither is it important. It may

be disappointing to be told that some of the picturesque details in the story of Abraham and some of the marvels of the Exodus are the imaginative touches of a later writer, but, after all, our salvation is in no wise bound up with these things, and no vital interest of our faith is imperilled even if we relinquish them altogether.

On the other hand, if the modern critical inquiry has shown that, in matters of science and history, and in their methods of literary composition, the biblical writers stand on the same level and reveal the same limitations as other writers of their time, it has not affected, save to bring out with greater convincingness than ever, the ethical and religious uniqueness of the imperishable legacy which they have bequeathed to us. The Bible which criticism puts back into our hands—such at least is one preacher's experience—is both a larger and a diviner book. More than ever is it his ally and helper, when he stands between men and things unseen, seeking to make them feel how near is God, how imperative is duty. See, for example, what criticism has done for the Hebrew prophets. There is a whole region of biblical territory which has not only been, as one eloquent expositor puts it, 'explored, illuminated, made habitable for modern men,' but has been shown to be a habitation of God Himself, and from every corner of which we can now hear His voice, summoning men to righteousness in all social relations and in all national policies. And this surely is the true miracle of the Bible: that a book slowly put together in a way that we are now coming to understand, bearing in it the traces of its human origin and growth,

should yet have such power to bring God to men, to bring men to God. It is herein that we find what men, conscious of the book's power on them, have called its 'inspiration.' There are those who still ask us how the inspiration of the Bible differs from that, say, of Shakespeare. Well, no one would wish to belittle the greatness of God's gift to men in the myriad-minded poet. Shakespeare has given us much, and very much, but here, in a word, is the difference: Shakespeare has not given us God, and the Bible has. And when I say that the Bible has given us God, I am not theorizing. It is a fact to which human experience for now nearly two thousand years has set its seal, that God is in this book as He is in no other. The Bible does not answer all our questions, it does a better thing: it brings us face to face with the great Answerer. Through it we learn of Christ, in Him we find God, in knowledge of whom standeth our eternal life. Experience can make us sure of nothing if not of this. And the point to be insisted on is that this was not more true of the Bible of our fathers than it is of the Bible of modern criticism. There are questions concerning it which are, and are likely long to remain, open questions. But its supreme religious worth is settled—for the critics as much as for the rest of us. 'The growth and transmission of the record of revelation,' says Dr. James Moffatt, one of our foremost British scholars in the field of New Testament criticism, 'constitute a whole series of problems and questions, which criticism may discuss without any prejudice whatever. Our experience of God, as mediated through Scripture, is calmly independent of all such inquiries.

. . . In this written record, with all its literary imperfections and obscurities, God can still make us understand both words and works that are a gospel to mankind, searching and luminous and redemptive.'[1] Let the preacher enter into this experience with the Word for himself; let him meet God in the Bible; in all its many voices let him hearken for the one Voice which through them is ever speaking, and he will learn, and through him his people will learn, to await without fear all that scholarship, which is God's servant and ours, has yet to say to us concerning His Word.

[1] *The Historical New Testament*, Preface to Second Edition, p. xxviii.

V

THE PREACHER AND MIRACLES

There is an external evidence of the truth of the biblical revelation which lies behind the question of the supernatural as it is usually stated, an evidence which lies, not in the miraculous circumstances of this or that particular act of revelation, but in the intrinsic character of the scheme of revelation as a whole. It is a general law of human history that truth is consistent, progressive, and imperishable, while every falsehood is self-contradictory, and ultimately falls to pieces. A religion which has endured every possible trial, which has outlived every vicissitude of human fortunes, and has never failed to re-assert its power unbroken in the collapse of its old environments, which has pursued a consistent and victorious course through the lapse of eventful centuries, declares itself by irresistible evidence to be a thing of reality and power.

W. Robertson Smith.

CHAPTER V

The Preacher and Miracles

It has become very much of a commonplace in recent apologetics to dwell on the change in men's attitude toward the miraculous. The mere portent no longer impresses us. We look on it with the eyes of the hardened sceptic. It moves us to no belief, unless it be in the credulity of them who receive and relate it. The change may be illustrated from the life of St. Francis of Assisi. The reverent awe in which the great saint was held was intensified a hundredfold by the belief, so widespread during the Middle Ages, that he had borne in his body the marks of the Crucified. Nor does the twentieth century refuse its meed of wonder to the holy man, but it does not bestow it on the Stigmata. That which moves us in St. Francis is 'the fresh and living fountain of joy and love which Christ opened through him for that age of gloom and superstition'[1]; but the Stigmata we pass on to the psychologist to receive some learned label, and to be put on the shelf side by side with other specimens of abnormally developed psychic powers. Now, the miracles of the Bible, or, at least, the miracles of Jesus, are never mere marvels. Jesus pointedly refused to play the

[1] Rufus M. Jones' *Studies in Mystical Religion*, p. 165.

part of wonder-worker to gaping crowds. Nevertheless, just in so far as the element of the marvellous and the inexplicable enters into the record of His life, the modern, unlike the mediaeval mind, hesitates and halts. 'The miraculous element of the Gospels,' writes Mr. A. C. Benson in one of his delightful books, 'troubled me little, *though I had rather it had not been there.*'[1] And in that saying the thoughts of many hearts to-day are revealed. Men are touched and awed by the glory and sweet tenderness of the gospel story, but they had rather the miracles were not there. The evidential value of miracles, Dr. Forsyth frankly declares, is quite gone.[2] They are no more part of the proof of Christianity; they are themselves something to be proved. Once the foundation of apologetics, it has been said, they became in time its crutch; now they have become its crux. Once they carried Christianity; now Christianity must carry them. 'Instead of miracles enabling us to believe in Christ, it takes our faith in Christ to enable us to believe in the miracles.'[3]

We may lament this change of attitude; we may be convinced that men are losers by it; but at any rate let us resist the temptation to scold. The change is due in part to a misunderstanding of the true character and purpose of Christ's miracles—a misunderstanding for which Christian apologetics must take its share of responsibility; still more is it due to the fact that no man can escape the

[1] *The Gate of Death*, p. 38 (italics mine).

[2] *Positive Preaching and Modern Mind*, p. 256.

[3] See an article 'The Evidential Value of Miracles' by Dr. Forsyth in *The London Quarterly Review*, January, 1909.

intellectual inheritance to which he is born. If it is of the will of God that we are living in this age and not in an earlier, it is no less of His ordering that many beliefs, easy to our fathers, are difficult or impossible to us. And the preacher must remember this. He will never serve his own generation if he is continually girding at it and suggesting that its doubt is devil-born. He must take men as he finds them, and as God has made them, and minister to them with an understanding mind. And if on this question of miracles it be given to him to speak the right word, so great is the confusion by which the subject is beset, it may prove the opening of the kingdom of heaven to many believers.

I

I have referred to one change which seems to increase the difficulty of the preacher's task in dealing with miracles; but there is another, which we may heartily welcome, and which, if we know how to avail ourselves of it, will greatly aid us. It is coming now to be recognized on all sides that the reality of the miraculous is at bottom simply a question of evidence. There is a healthy and growing impatience of all attempts to settle in advance what is or is not possible in a world like ours. If the Bible miracles are to be set aside, it cannot be on the ground of any supposed antecedent impossibilities; it can only be because the evidence by which they are supported is insufficient. As long ago as 1866 Professor Huxley wrote to the *Spectator*, 'Denying the possibility of

miracles seems to me quite as unjustifiable as speculative Atheism.'[1] And again, in a letter written in 1877, he said, 'I have not the slightest objection to offer *a priori* to all the propositions in the three creeds. The mysteries of the Church are child's play compared with the mysteries of Nature. The doctrine of the Trinity is not more puzzling than the necessary antinomies of physical speculation; virgin procreation and resuscitation from apparent death are ordinary phenomena for the naturalist. It would be a great error, therefore, to suppose that the Agnostic rejects Theology because of its puzzles and wonders. He rejects it simply because in his judgement there would be no evidence sufficient to warrant the theological propositions, even if they related to the commonest and most obvious every-day propositions.'[2] Huxley's rejection of the Christian facts is, it is true, almost contemptuous in its decisiveness; none the less, his letter marks the beginning of a better understanding between Christianity and science; for Christianity asks of science no more than this, that it be permitted to produce its facts, and that no attempt be made to block the way to their fullest investigation by unproved and unprovable presuppositions. If this be granted, neither Huxley's nor any one else's scornful estimate of the Christian evidences need trouble us; the Christian apologist has secured the advantage to which he is legitimately entitled; he is absolved from the old weary discussions of *a priori* credibilities, and instead of threshing out the

[1] Quoted in C. F. Nolloth's *Person of our Lord*, p. 190.

[2] Quoted in Gore's *Bampton Lectures*, p. 246. See also chapter vii. in Huxley's *Hume* (English Men of Letters series).

dry straw about the laws of Nature, he may proceed at once to set forth the historical grounds on which his faith in miracles rests.

But this method of procedure involves a further consequence which we must be careful not to overlook. If the miraculous is at bottom a question of evidence, obviously we cannot claim for all the miracles the same degree of certainty that we can claim for some. In the case of the supreme Christian miracle, the Resurrection of Jesus Christ, the evidence is so full and varied as to warrant unwavering conviction. But the miracles of Old Testament history are attested by no such decisive proofs, and to insist on bracketing these with the miracles of Christ, and making them all stand or fall together, is to involve ourselves in hopeless confusion. Unless we are prepared to admit varying degrees of certainty in the miraculous stories of the Bible, we must abandon all idea of making good our defence on grounds of evidence, and entrench ourselves as best we can in the old fort of biblical infallibility.

This distinction between miracles according to the sufficiency or insufficiency of their evidence, reasonable as it would seem to be—except, of course, to those to whom anything recorded in the Bible *must* be true—is yet strangely forgotten alike by those who attack, and by those who defend, the miracles of the Bible. Dr. Goldwin Smith, for example, in an essay entitled 'The Miraculous Element in Christianity,' writes, 'We cannot pick and choose. The evidence upon which the miraculous darkness and the apparitions of the dead rest is the same as that upon which all the other

miracles rest, and must be accepted or rejected in all the cases alike.'[1] From an ex-professor of history, accustomed to distinguish between statements for which the evidence is good, or not so good, or not good at all, this is a singularly perverse judgement. It is but another example of the way in which able men with a prejudice against Christianity seem to be suddenly bereft of all their usual acumen when they take in hand to criticize the narratives of the New Testament. As every student of the four Gospels knows, the miraculous incidents in our Lord's life are not all equally attested, and, as Dr. Sanday has pointed out, that of the apparitions of the dead on the day of the crucifixion (Matt. xxvii. 52) belongs just to that stratum which carries with it the least weight.[2] Nor is it only the assailant of the miraculous who errs through forgetfulness of this distinction. The Christian apologist is no less at fault who will have it that to doubt one miracle is to weaken the credibility of all, and who takes his stand with equal confidence by the falling walls of Jericho and the open grave of Jesus. It is a poor service that we do

[1] *Guesses at the Riddle of Existence*, p. 160.

[2] *Outlines of the Life of Christ*, p. 109. A further paragraph from Dr. Sanday's book will explain to those who are unfamiliar with the results of the modern study of the Gospels what is meant by the statement in the text: 'Without committing ourselves to all the niceties of the Synoptic problem, there are at any rate broad grounds for distinguishing between the matter that is found in all the three Synoptics, in the First and Third, and in only one of the Three. Whether the ultimate groundwork is written or oral, the threefold matter represents the groundwork, and is therefore, if not necessarily the oldest, at least the most broadly based and authoritative. There is reason to think that the double matter is also very ancient. It consists largely of discourse, but some few narratives seem to belong to it. The peculiar sections of the different Gospels vary considerably in their character, and it is natural to suppose that they would have the least antecedent presumption in their favour. Some confirmatory evidence would be needed for facts which rested on their testimony alone' (p. 107).

the doubter when we tie up the certain and the uncertain in a single bundle and insist that he must take all or nothing.

At the same time it should be clearly understood why the distinction is made. It is not a concession flung to the wolves of rationalism. There is no thought of making the miraculous more acceptable by reducing its bulk. That is a fond and futile idea which Matthew Arnold long ago treated with the derision it deserves. 'It is,' he said, 'as if we were startled by the extravagance of supposing Cinderella's fairy godmother to have actually changed the pumpkin into a coach and six, but should suggest that she did really change it into a one-horse cab.'[1] To those who will not have the miraculous on any terms, half a dozen miracles present just as insuperable a difficulty as half a hundred. No; we make the distinction because the facts of the Bible demand it, and because, without it, it is impossible, in the light of what we now know concerning our sacred records, honestly and intelligently to interpret them.

With this in mind, we may now go on to a brief discussion of (1) the miracles of Jesus, and (2) the miracles of the Old Testament.

II

How stands it, then, with the miraculous element in the Gospels? Have we evidence sufficient to justify the belief that Jesus really did the mighty works that they attribute to Him? To answer

[1] *God and the Bible*, p. 23.

such a question adequately in a few paragraphs is manifestly impossible; but I will do what I can to indicate some of the lines along which a preacher to-day who desires to have always an intellectual conscience void of offence may assure both himself and those who hear him of the certainty of the things which we have received concerning Christ. I do not forget Huxley's canon—a canon with which no reasonable man will wish to quarrel—that 'the more a statement of facts conflicts with previous experience, the more complete must be the evidence which is to justify us in believing it'[1]; and yet I have no hesitation in saying that except for a narrow margin of doubtful incidents, in regard to which it may be necessary to suspend our judgement, we may confidently accept as accurate the general impression of Christ's ministry which the evangelists themselves had received, and which by their records they sought to convey to their readers. The relevant facts may be classified as external and internal evidence.

1. We turn, in the first place, to our chief documentary witnesses, the Synoptic Gospels. What is the nature of their testimony to the miraculous activities of Jesus? After the most patient and prolonged investigation, Christian scholarship seems now to be finally settling down to the judgement that behind the first three Gospels, in the form in which we now possess them, there lie at least three main sources from which they have been compiled:

(1) Our present St. Mark, which has supplied the outline and broad narrative of our Lord's public ministry as it is found in the other two Gospels.

[1] *Hume*, p. 134.

(2) A collection consisting for the most part of discourses, which an ancient tradition would lead us to think was the work of St. Matthew, and which was drawn upon by both the first evangelist and St. Luke, but not, or in a much less degree, by St. Mark. (This document is usually indicated by the symbol Q.)

(3) Certain special material peculiar to the first Gospel and St. Luke.[1]

Now, the lowest date at which the latest of our Synoptic Gospels was written cannot be later than about A.D. 90, and it may well have been earlier; so that when we get back to the older and original sources we are dealing with documents which belong to the generation of those who had known Jesus, and which may with every probability be traced to eye-witnesses. In other words, our Synoptic Gospels furnish us with genuine first-hand testimony concerning the greater part of the events which they relate.

Further, each of our sources bears its individual witness to the miracles and to the different kinds of miracles. Moreover, the didactic and the miraculous are so inextricably interwoven that it is impossible to disentangle them without destroying the whole. Everywhere the great Teacher is also the great Healer. Sometimes a miracle is the starting-point for the teaching, sometimes a saying 'which only hyper-criticism would regard as invented' presupposes a miracle.[2] Of course, if we have made up our minds beforehand that a miracle never was

[1] See Dr. Sanday's article 'The Bearing of Criticism upon the Gospel History,' *Expository Times*, December, 1908.

[2] See Professor A. S. Peake's *Christianity, Its Nature and Its Truth*, p. 169.

and never could be, we are free to reconstruct the Gospel story as we will; but if we have any real regard for the sources upon which we depend for all our knowledge of the historical Jesus, it is impossible to leave the miraculous out of account. In them, and in all of them, He is always *a man approved of God by mighty works and wonders and signs.* 'Miracles,' says the author of *Ecce Homo,* 'play so important a part in Christ's scheme that any theory which would represent them as due entirely to the imagination of His followers, or of a later age, destroys the credibility of the documents, not partially but wholly, and leaves Christ a personage as mythical as Hercules.'[1]

Again, if Christ did no miracle, how are we to account for the kind of impression which His life made upon His contemporaries? They were astonished at His doctrine; they were still more astonished at His deeds. Take, for example, Mark's graphic account of what happened on Christ's first appearance in the synagogue at Capernaum: *And they were all amazed, insomuch that they questioned among themselves, saying, What is this? a new teaching! With authority He commandeth even the unclean spirits, and they obey Him* (i. 27). This is a note with which every reader of the Gospels is familiar; but would it be there at all were it not for something extraordinary in Christ's ministry over and above the teaching and the preaching? Still more significant are the explanations of His enemies: *This man doth not cast out devils, but by Beelzebub the prince of the devils* (Matt. xii. 24). It is the hiss of malevolence baffled and bankrupt; but why explain

[1] P. 41.

at all unless it were manifest to everybody that there was something that demanded explanation?[1] This same fact, in another aspect of it, is well set forth by Dr. Sanday: 'No sooner,' he says, 'had the life of Jesus ended in apparent failure and shame than the great body of Christians—not an individual here and there, but the mass of the Church—passed over at once to the fixed belief that He was God. By what conceivable process could the men of that day have arrived at such a conclusion if there had been really nothing in His life to distinguish it from that of ordinary men? . . . There must have been something about the life, a broad and substantial element in it which *they could recognize* as supernatural and divine—not that we can recognize, but which they could recognize with the ideas of the time. Eliminate miracles from the career of Jesus, and the belief of Christians, from the first moment that we have undoubted contemporary evidence of it (say A.D. 50), becomes an insoluble enigma.'[2]

Yet another bit of external evidence that must be reckoned with before we can get rid of the miraculous is the belief of Jesus Himself. On this point the story of the Temptation seems decisive. If, as we may surely assume, the ultimate source of the story is Jesus Himself, it reveals unmistakably His own consciousness of the possession of superhuman power. It is on the exercise of that power that the whole story turns. 'It not only implies the possession of power to work such miracles as were actually worked, but others even more remarkable

[1] See *The Expositor's Greek Testament*, i. 23.

[2] *Outlines of the Life of Christ*, p. 113.

from the point of view of crude interference with the order of Nature. The story of the Temptation implies that Jesus *could* have worked such miracles if He had willed to do so ; and the reason why He did not work them was only because He did not will.'[1] It is perhaps unnecessary to illustrate the point further. The author of *Ecce Homo*, while waiving the question whether miracles were actually wrought, accepts as a fact ' established by evidence as ample as any historical fact whatever' that Christ *professed* to work miracles.[2] Is there, then, any escape from the trilemma : Christ was a deceiver, or He was deceived, or the miracles stand ?

2. Yet the external evidence for the Gospel miracles, strong as it is, would fail to satisfy Huxley's canon, were it not joined with internal evidence of a peculiarly compelling power. And here it is necessary to insist on a thorough overhauling of some of our stock conceptions of miracle. If we misunderstand its true place and function in revelation, we may easily create in our minds an initial prejudice against it strong enough to nullify almost any evidence that can be brought forward in its support ; whereas, rightly understood, the Gospel miracles make way for themselves by their own intrinsic reasonableness. To the apologists of an earlier day—and the remark is probably true of many Christian people still—miracles were simply proofs, a kind of evidential appendix to the revelation, the seal and guarantee of its divine origin and authority. Dr. Stalker, in his admirable *Life of Jesus Christ*, speaking of the miracles and the

[1] *Outlines of the Life of Christ*, p. 110.

[2] p. 40.

teaching of Jesus as the two great instruments by which He did His work, distinguishes between them in this fashion: the teaching, he says, 'was by far the more important of the two. His miracles were only the bell tolled to bring the people to hear His words.'[1] And, yet again, there are those who would persuade us that the miracles are only so much supernatural baggage, of which the Church would do well to disencumber itself as quickly as possible. In each of these cases the conception of miracle is so inadequate that, if the mind be possessed by it, it would seem to be incapacitated for doing justly by the miracles of Jesus.

Have we any clue to Christ's own thoughts on the matter? Read His words to the disciples of the Baptist: *Go your way and tell John the things which ye do hear and see: the blind receive their sight, and the lame walk, the lepers are cleansed, and the deaf hear, and the dead are raised up, and the poor have good tidings preached to them* (Matt. xi. 5). Here miracles and preaching stand on the same level; they are each part of the one revelation of grace. In His preaching Christ declared the grace of God in word; in His miracles He declared the grace of God in deed. In other words, the miracles are not the guarantee of the revelation; they are the revelation. They are not the bell rung to let the people know a sermon is going to be preached; they are the sermon. When God speaks to me in miracle it is not that He may establish the truth of some other thing which He has said elsewhere; this is the very thing that He would say, the very heart of the good news which He brings to me in Christ. This is love

[1] p. 64

at work, love in exercise, love doing its best for men, not, forsooth, that it may 'prove' something, but because men are in need, and because this is love's way. We see at once, then, how strangely they misunderstand to whom the miracles of Jesus are but superfluous tags of embroidery to which with a light heart they may take their shears, with no fear of damaging the fabric; they are the very warp and woof of Christian truth. Let them go, and you let go that which, more than all else, save Christ's death on the Cross, has brought hope to the sinful, trembling heart of man; you make a silence over great spaces of that Life in which men have heard and seen the Father.

The argument from what I have called the intrinsic reasonableness of the Gospel miracles may be put in another way. They are Christ's miracles, and they are wholly congruous with all else that we know of Him, and with the whole impression that His life and person make upon us. If the question be asked how it is possible to believe that any one ever fed five thousand persons with five loaves and two fishes, the answer is very simple: we are not asked to believe that 'any one' wrought so great a marvel, and if we are wise we shall refuse to discuss the question in that abstract form. The 'one' of whom the statement is made is Christ, and it is just the fact that it is Christ's miracle that makes all the difference. We should come to the miracles through Christ, not to Christ through the miracles. He Himself is the greater miracle, and He certifies the less. In Him they become credible; He is the one final argument for their reality. Let a man make his own the New Testament way of thinking about

Christ; above all, let him realize what Christ was to His own consciousness; and the miracles attributed to Him, if they do not at once become natural and necessary, will at least seem no longer impossible. As one writer puts it, 'they flow naturally from a Person who, despite His obvious humanity, impresses us throughout as being at home in two worlds.'[1] Or, as another has it, they are 'a congruous part of that whole of which our Lord's personal worth is the greater part, but of which this part, too, is the fitting complement.'[2]

It is from the point of view now gained that we are able, without difficulty, to take a true measure of some of the popular objections urged against miracles. Goethe, for example, is quoted as saying, 'A voice from heaven would not convince me that water burned or a dead man rose again.' Of course it would not. But the Christian miracles are not solitary, unrelated portents, signifying nothing; they are revealing and redeeming acts of divine grace. They are parts of a larger whole, and the first condition of judging them justly is the recognition of their congruity with a great divine effort on behalf of human good. Here, too, is the answer to Huxley's famous question about the centaur trotting down Regent Street—what amount of testimony would make it credible?[3] and to Matthew Arnold's not less famous argument: 'Suppose I could change the pen with which I write this into a penwiper, I should not thus make

[1] J. R. Illingworth's *Divine Immanence*, p. 89.

[2] Principal Rainy's lecture in *The Supernatural in Christianity*, p. 24.

[3] *Hume*, p. 134.

what I write any the truer or more convincing.'[1] Perhaps it is time to let these sayings sleep in their proper graves. It is certainly no kindness to the reputation of their authors to disinter them. Dr. Marcus Dods was not too severe when he said that every friend of Arnold must wish his pen had been changed into a penwiper before he wrote that sentence.[2] But lest any one should still be perturbed by them, let it be said once more, that anything more unlike the miracles of Jesus than the vulgar sleight-of-hand of Arnold's illustration, or the meaningless portent of Huxley's centaur in Regent Street, could hardly be conceived. Let any one read again the heart-moving pages that reveal the might and pity of the gracious Christ, of Him who laid healing hands on the demoniac child and the blind beggar by the wayside, who gave back their dead to the widow of Nain and to the home of Jaïrus, and then let him ask what kinship stories like these have with the absurd imaginings of Huxley and Arnold.

But while we are warranted in speaking thus positively concerning the miracles of Jesus as a whole, neither internal nor external evidence will justify the same degree of certainty concerning some of the details. If we are to be faithful to the facts we cannot refuse to discriminate. Even so sober and cautious a New Testament scholar as Dr. Sanday—'the veteran leader of scientific conservatism in British theology,' as he has been called[3]—admits that between the crucifixion and

[1] *Literature and Dogma*, p. 95.

[2] *The Bible, its Origin and Nature*, p. 243.

[3] By Dr. J. Hope Moulton, in a paper read at the National Free Church Council, 1911.

the date of our earliest Gospel there was 'perhaps room for a certain amount of growth and accretion in the narrative.'[1] And to those who impatiently ask, 'Well, then, where are we to draw the line?' we can only answer that we do not know, that indeed no hard-and-fast line can be drawn; we are simply without the materials for a dogmatic conclusion either way, and the only thing we can do is to leave a few points with a note of interrogation standing against them. One or two examples will illustrate the kind of uncertainty which candour compels us to acknowledge.

Is every incident really miraculous which is commonly regarded as such? Is not our prosaic, unimaginative way of handling the Gospel stories sometimes responsible for an interpretation which the narrative was never intended to bear? For example, if the command of Jesus to Peter to go to the sea, and cast in a hook, and draw out a fish in which he would find the shekel with which to pay the Temple tax, is to be taken literally, then it must be confessed that for many minds such a miracle as is implied would be entirely lacking in that subtle internal evidence which for most of the miracles of Jesus is their strongest support. Indeed, one reverent and orthodox interpreter—Dr. David Smith—does not hesitate to say bluntly that as miracle the story is 'grotesque,' and deserves the ridicule that has been poured upon it.[2] Is it not far more natural to suppose that Christ's words were simply a bit of playful banter addressed to Peter the fisherman, reminding him that a single

[1] *Expository Times*, December, 1908, p. 113.
[2] *The Days of His Flesh*, p, 282.

catch in the lake hard by and a sale in the Capernaum market would solve the whole difficulty?

Again, it is possible, as Dr. Sanday says, that here and there what was originally parable may in course of transmission have hardened into miracle.[1] If this be so, it is perhaps in this direction that we may look for light on that most difficult story, the withering of the barren fig-tree. The story is told by Matthew (xxi. 18–22) and Mark (xi. 12–14), but omitted by Luke. Luke, on the other hand, relates a *parable* of a barren fig-tree (xiii. 6–9) which, again, has no place in the other Gospels. May it be that, in some way that we cannot now trace, the story grew out of the original parable? We are moving, of course, in the realm of conjecture; but the narrative as it stands is so full of difficulty, and leaves on the mind so unpleasant an impression, that one may be pardoned for snatching perhaps too eagerly at any reasonable suggestion that holds out the hope of escape.[2]

And, finally, we must make room for a possible intermingling of legend with history in the Gospel narratives. Every student of the New Testament is aware that one of the many causes leading to the corruption of the sacred text in the early days of Christian history was an exaggerated love of the miraculous. To this cause probably we may attribute the details about the troubling of the

[1] *Outlines of the Life of Christ*, p. 113.

[2] See *Dictionary of Christ and the Gospels*, i., 593; Estlin Carpenter's *First Three Gospels*, p. 199. Sir W. M. Ramsay, after pointing out that the barren fig-tree mentioned in Matt. xxi. and Mark xi. was nearly four thousand feet above the Dead Sea, 'where no person could dream of finding fruit at Easter,' goes on to say that the story is to him utterly obscure and he has no opinion about it to offer (*Expositor*, sixth series, vol. xi., p. 153).

water by the angel in the story of the impotent man at the pool of Bethesda (John v. 2–9). They find no place in the best MSS., and are omitted from the text by the Revised Version. In the same way we may get rid of the difficult saying at the end of St. Mark's Gospel, *They shall take up serpents, and if they drink any deadly thing it shall in no wise hurt them*—it is no part of the original Gospel. The tendency which led to these unauthorized addenda is well explained by Dr. A. B. Davidson: 'The nearer we approach to the era of Christ and the Apostles, the more do the MSS. gain in simplicity, and in a certain stately coldness of narration free from all extravagance and exaggeration, whether of sentiment or dogma; and the original writer seems little more than a transparent medium through which the rays of truth pass, unrefracted and uncoloured; and he narrates the most pathetic occurrences with no apparent emotion, and utters the profoundest truths as if quite unconscious of their profundity. This strange neutrality perplexed a later time; and so it threw in, here and there, what appeared to it the appropriate sentiment, and impressed what was considered to be the needful emphasis.'[1] In cases such as those I have named, textual criticism comes to our aid by cutting away the unlawful excrescences. But, it may be asked, if thus early we can trace the influence of Christian legend, may it not be that in some instances the original narrative itself has been tainted by the same source? It is impossible to ignore the question, and equally impossible to answer it with certainty. Perhaps all that can be

[1] *Biblical and Literary Essays*, p. 204.

said is that if legend has found its way into our Gospels—Dr. A. B. Bruce thinks that the verse about the opening graves and the resurrection of many saints on the day of the Crucifixion is a proof that it has[1]—it is to so small a degree as in no wise to affect the substantial trustworthiness of the record. And as long as faith has assurance of this it need not concern itself for the rest.

This, then, is the conclusion of the whole matter: the frankest investigation of the Gospel narratives, while it may compel us to revise and in revising to reduce our estimate of a few individual incidents, not only leaves us with a Christ who wrought great miracles, but sets our faith on surer foundations than ever.

III

When, however, from the miracles of Jesus we turn to the miracles of the Old Testament, we are confronted with a situation which is entirely different. In the case of the former, we possess, as we have seen, first-hand contemporary evidence. In the case of many of the latter—such, for example, as those associated with the Exodus—I as have before pointed out, the events are divided from their earliest written records by a gulf of centuries. Further, it must be confessed that even when the history is quite near to the events, as in the narratives concerning Elijah and Elisha, some of the marvels related are wholly wanting in that intrinsic quality which counts for so much in the miracles of

[1] *Expositor's Greek Testament*, i. 332.

Jesus. And lastly—and this is the greatest difference of all—Old Testament history has no supreme sinless Figure of whose divine might and pity signs and wonders and mighty works are the natural speech. Such is the situation, and for those who would maintain the historical character of the miracles of the Old Testament, it must be admitted it is not a very promising one. Let us see what can be made of it.

It must be plain ere this, even to those who most resolutely stand by the old ways, that a considerable narrowing of the area of the miraculous in the Old Testament is inevitable. To insist on a literal acceptance of all the marvels which have found their way into Israel's history is to impose on faith a burden which it can and will no longer bear. I may note a few points concerning which there is now pretty general agreement among even moderate and conservative Christian scholars.

In a few cases it seems probable that the miraculous aspect of the story is due to simple misapprehension. Of this perhaps there is no better illustration than is furnished by the old puzzle of Joshua commanding the sun to stand still. But as the Revised Version by printing Joshua's words—which are a quotation from the 'Book of Jashar'—in the form of poetry, has put even the simplest reader on to the right path for solving the difficulty for himself, it is needless to say anything further about it here. A much less hackneyed illustration may be found in the narrative of one of Samson's exploits. Samson, we read in the Authorized Version, after slaying a thousand Philistines with the jawbone of an ass, *was sore athirst, and called*

on the Lord . . . but God clave an hollow place that was in the jaw and there came water thereout; and when he had drunk, his spirit came again, and he revived (Judges xv. 18–19). The Revised Version, however, renders the passage thus: *God clave the hollow place that is in Lehi and there came water thereout,* &c. The truth is that the Hebrew will bear either translation, but that the Revised Version gives the true rendering appears certain from the statement with which the verse concludes, that the spring 'is in Lehi unto this day' (so even A.V.). By this simple change the Revisers have removed from the story a grotesque and incredible prodigy. The spring from which Samson drank was not 'in the jaw,' but 'in Lehi,' the hill of the jawbone, 'which in all probability took its name from its shape, just as possibly the shape of another hill gave to it the name of Golgotha—the place of the skull.'[1] May it not also be, as some scholars have suggested, that but for the misunderstanding of the geographical term the jawbone would have had no place in the story at all? Samson wrought his deed of daring *bilechi,* i.e., not with the jawbone, but at Lehi—such, probably, was the story in its earliest and simplest form.[2]

Again, there can be no doubt that not a few of the miraculous narratives of the Old Testament belong

[1] J. E. McFadyen's *Old Testament Criticism and the Christian Church*, p. 265. This rendering is, of course, much older than the R. V.; cp. Milton's *Samson Agonistes*:

> 'God, who caused a fountain at thy prayer
> From the dry ground to spring, thy thirst to allay
> After the brunt of battle . . .'

[2] See McFadyen *in loc.* and W. G. Jordan's *Biblical Criticism and Modern Thought*, p. 224.

to what has already been called 'symbolical history'[1] rather than to history proper. Thus, the story of the manna, of which *the children of Israel did eat forty years, until they came to a land inhabited* (Exod. xvi. 35) is a symbol of the historic truth 'that, in this barren environment and trying period of their history, Jehovah amply provided all that was needed for the welfare of His people.'[2] The narrative of Elijah and the ravens (1 Kings xvii.) belongs to the same category. The old attempts to get rid of the difficulty by changing the vowel points of the Hebrew word, and so getting it to mean not 'ravens' but 'merchants,' or 'Arabians,' are now abandoned as the clumsy expedients of an unimaginative literalism which could not distinguish between poetry and prose. In the same way we may interpret the story of Joshua's capture of Jericho: *And it came to pass, when the people heard the sound of the trumpet, that the people shouted with a great shout, and the wall fell down flat, so that the people went up into the city, every man straight before him, and they took the city* (Josh. vi. 20). A recent writer in the American *Sunday School Times* gravely suggests that the falling of the walls was due to the vibratory motion of the march, rendering the foundations insecure; and for the effects of the shout he compares the concussion of cannonading or the blasting of rocks.[3] When literalism leads us to the precipice in this fashion it is surely time to seek some saner and safer guide. 'In war,' says

[1] See p. 113.

[2] Kent's *Heroes and Crises of Early Hebrew History*, p. 209.

[3] Quoted in McFadyen's *Old Testament Criticism and the Christian Church*, p. 267.

Dr. George Adam Smith, 'Jericho has always been easily taken. That her walls fell down at the sound of Joshua's trumpets is no exaggeration, but the soberest summary of all her history. . . . She never stood a siege, and her inhabitants were always running away.'[1] Have we not here the key to the interpretation of the story? The trumpets blew, the walls fell flat: this is the writer's vivid pictorial way of saying that the city surrendered at the first challenge of her foes. 'No walls can stand before Jehovah when He fights for His people.'

In at least one remarkable narrative—the passage of the Red Sea by the children of Israel (Exod. xiv.)—the modern critical analysis of the Pentateuch enables us to trace the gradual growth of a story under the influence of tradition or poetic imagination. As to the main facts of the story—the safe passage of the Israelites and the overthrow of the Egyptians—both the chief documents are at one; but there is considerable difference in detail. In the earlier Jehovah acts through natural causes: He *caused the sea to go back by a strong east wind all the night, and made the sea dry land* (ver. 21), then, in the morning, *the sea returned to its wonted flow* (ver. 27); but in the later document Moses lifts up his hand and at the signal the waters divide automatically, forming a pathway, with a wall of water on each side; upon the signal being given a second time, the waters reunite and close upon the Egyptians. The difference is no doubt due to the fact that as the story of the great deliverance was handed down from generation to generation in the mouths of the people, it was, as Dr. Driver says,

[1] *Historical Geography of the Holy Land*, pp. 267, 268.

'variously embellished by the unconscious play of the imagination. And so in the later writers the occurrence is attributed far more to the direct supernatural power of God.'[1]

What is to be said of the series of marvels attributed to Elijah and Elisha, and especially to the latter? They will, of course, impress different minds differently. Canon Liddon found nothing incredible in Elisha's making the axe to swim, nor even in the wonder-working power of the prophet's dead bones.[2] And with the faith of such no one would wish for a moment to interfere; only let them not grow angry if they find among their Christian brethren multitudes who are unable to share it with them. The tendency to surround a great name with a halo of miraculous glory has probably been at work here as elsewhere. The stories told concerning Elijah and Elisha help us to understand the impression which their greatness made on the popular mind, and so, indirectly, to understand the men themselves; but we can no more insist on their literal historical character than we can upon the historicity of kindred legends which have gathered about the names of mediaeval saints like St. Francis of Assisi. The following sentences from the careful and reverent article on miracles in Hastings' *Dictionary of the Bible* represent what I take to be the now generally accepted opinion of Christian scholars: 'It cannot be said that the miracles ascribed to these prophets are *essential* to the history, nor can it be maintained that all of their miracles are on the lofty moral

[1] *Exodus* (Cambridge Bible), pp. 114, 124.
[2] *Sermons on the Old Testament*, p. 321.

level which we have found to be conspicuously the case with the miracles of Christ. It is a hypothesis with a good deal of *prima facie* evidence in its favour that the miracle-stories of 1 Kings xvii., xviii., 2 Kings i.–vi., are rather of the nature of Jewish Haggadoth than sober history.' 'On the whole,' the article continues—and I gladly make the writer's summary my own—' while we maintain that the history of the Jews cannot be truly interpreted unless the special intervention of Providence in many a crisis of their national life be discerned, . . . we cannot think that the evidence for several recorded miracles is at all sufficient to compel implicit credence in their literal truth.'[1]

To many of my readers all this will be but the most elementary commonplace. Indeed, it is only a summing up of what Christian teachers in England like Sanday, Driver, Skinner, Garvie, and Horton have been saying in greater detail for many years past. To others, however, whose minds have not been prepared by previous reading, the foregoing paragraphs may have a distressingly negative sound. It may even be that to some they will appear of the nature of dangerous concessions to an unbelieving and godless rationalism. Inasmuch, however, as my one aim in writing these pages is to convince my younger brethren in the ministry that they may accept all the new knowledge of our time, and still go on preaching, with no tremor of misgiving in their tone, let me seek once more to assure them that, though things are as I have indicated, our sense of the worth of the Old

[1] Vol. iii., 393. Cp. also Sanday's *Life of Christ in Recent Research*, p. 211; Ottley's *Aspects of the Old Testament*, p. 63.

Testament need know no change; it will still remain the record of God's gradual revelation of Himself to the people of Israel. There are one or two facts to be kept steadily in mind.

In the first place, it should be clearly understood that no vital interest of Christian faith is at stake in the discussion. We may join in it, or listen to it, with no fears for what the issue may be. The question before us is not in any sense the reality of the supernatural; it is not even the general historical trustworthiness of the Old Testament; it is simply a question of interpretation, of the true meaning of a number of incidents the entire removal of which would not appreciably affect our conception of the course of Israel's history. And we must steadfastly resist any attempt to import into the discussion a significance which does not belong to it.

Further, let us be at pains to see on what ground hesitation is expressed concerning some of the Old Testament miracles. It is due to no reluctance to admit miracle on any terms. What has been said in the earlier part of this chapter concerning the miracles of Jesus should be sufficient evidence of this, at least so far as the present writer is concerned. Moreover, the argument from congruity of which so much has already been said holds here also, if not in the same degree of strength. If the Old Testament really be what all Christians believe it to be, the record of a divine movement destined to culminate in the Incarnation and Resurrection of the Son of God, if God did really deal with Israel as with no other nation, it is at least a credible thing that signs and wonders should accompany His unique

self-manifestation. If, then, we hesitate over some of the miraculous narratives which have come down to us from those times, we do so only because of the inadequacy of the evidence, external or internal or both, by which they are certified.

And, finally, let it be remembered, the real miracle of the Old Testament is not the 'miracles,' it is rather the revelation of divine grace and truth which came to men through the inspired lips of prophets, psalmists, and lawgivers. And if modern study of the Scriptures has in some degree diminished our regard for the one, it has set the other on a broader and loftier pedestal than ever. That God did speak to the fathers through holy men of old we know for ourselves, for through them we have heard Him speak to us. In comparison with this, of what small account are the exploits of Samson or the portents of Elisha! It makes no difference—here, at any rate, we can heartily agree with Matthew Arnold—to the preciousness of the revelation which was given to Israel of the immeasurable grandeur, the eternal necessity, the priceless blessing of righteousness, 'whether we believe that the Red Sea miraculously opened a passage to the Israelites, and the walls of Jericho miraculously fell down at the blast of Joshua's trumpet, or that these stories arose in the same way as other stories of the kind.'[1] As Dr. Horton truly says: 'No miracle in the Pentateuch is so wonderful as the man Moses himself, his work, his legislation, his power to stamp his faith on his people for ever.'[2] There is, indeed, a childish temper which is more impressed by the spectacular

[1] *Literature and Dogma*, p. 99.

[2] *My Belief*, p. 139.

than the moral and spiritual, which finds more to wonder at in Balaam's ass or Elisha's axe than in the message of Amos or the passion of the psalmists ; but until this is put away we shall never understand the greatness of the Old Testament. On the other hand, there are multitudes who, though they know that they can never again believe in some of the marvels recorded in that book, yet bow down with humble, thankful awe to learn what it has to teach us concerning God and duty. And to these the preacher may confidently make his appeal. Never, perhaps, in the history of the Church has it been as possible for a man seeking to impress his fellows with the urgency of the moral and spiritual, to make so large and sane a use of the Old Testament as it is to-day. If he may not roam with quite the old unchartered freedom through the byways of its history, everywhere else he may move with greater freedom and sureness of tread. The sympathy and sanity of Hebrew law, the grandeur and moral passion of Hebrew prophecy, the rapture and glow of Hebrew song, unite to make these ancient records as unique in religion as they are in literature.

VI

THE PREACHER AND CHRIST

Tu Rex Gloriae, Christe,
Tu Patris sempiternus es Filius.

TE DEUM.

Once when Rutherford was preaching, and had suddenly left the dissensions of the time to speak of the scent of the fair 'Rose of Sha on,' the Laird of Glanderston was heard to say in a loud whisper, 'Ay, now you're right—hold you there!'

VI

The Preacher and Christ

'Nobody,' it has been said, 'has any right to preach who has not mighty affirmations to make concerning God's Son, Jesus Christ—affirmations in which there is no ambiguity and which no questioning can reach.'[1] They are strong and confident words, the words of a man who is given to saying strong and confident things; there is in them, too, something of the ring of a challenge. But the confidence is justified, and the challenge is one which no Christian preacher can refuse. To make mighty affirmations concerning Jesus Christ—this is our business, this is what we are preachers for. We may make affirmations, many and mighty, concerning other matters, and gain for ourselves great glory as lecturers, or politicians, or social reformers; but if we falter here we have lost the right to call ourselves preachers. We are heralds, and the one duty of the herald is towards his King. But here, too, the preacher finds the spirit of inquiry at work. He may put up what fences and notice-boards he will, criticism laughs both him and them to scorn; it owns no law of trespass; it asserts its rights in the Gospels, no less than in the Pentateuch; it questions

[1] Denney's *Second Epistle to the Corinthians* (Expositor's Bible, p. 41).

Christ as freely as Moses. It is here, indeed, that the decisive battle is being fought. What happens to Moses or the Pentateuch is of comparatively little importance—after all, we are not Jews, we are Christians—but if the Gospels be discredited, if Christ be taken from us, there is nothing left to fight about; our preaching and our faith alike are vain. In this chapter, therefore, we shall seek to learn how it fares with our faith concerning Christ. Are the great old affirmations still valid? When criticism has spoken its last word, and when the changes in our thought-forms have been made that must be made, can we still assert the absolute significance of Christ for Christian faith? Can the mind and heart of this generation still worship Him as did the whole Church of the first days, and as the Church of the centuries has done, saying:

> Thou art the King of Glory, O Christ,
> Thou art the everlasting Son of the Father?

It is questions like these that lead straight to the very heart of our whole discussion.

I

Before attempting to indicate some of the results of recent discussions of Christ and the Gospels, it may be well to say a word concerning the tendency, which in some quarters has attained a considerable degree of strength, to depreciate the significance for faith of the Christian facts. Lessing's famous dictum that events of time cannot prove eternal truth—which Professor Gwatkin declares to be

'by far the strongest blow yet struck at Christianity'[1] —has acquired new force in the stress that has come upon us through the application to our Gospels of modern methods of historical inquiry. 'Oh, well,' men are beginning to say, 'if the history must go, let it go. Why should we worry ourselves any more about miracles? Why worry even about the supreme miracle, the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead? Whatever becomes of these, the great Christian ideas will remain, and it is by them that men live.' There are even some who, in their eagerness to assert Christianity's independence of historical fact, do not hesitate to declare with Schmiedel that their inmost religious convictions would suffer no harm even if they felt obliged to conclude that Jesus never lived.[2] It is not difficult to understand the attraction for many minds of this attitude towards the Christian history. We have been made to feel in this generation, as never before, the difficulty of attaining historical certitude. The truth is so elusive; it is so hard to be sure, especially when we are dealing with the events of a far distant past, that we are really face to face with the actual facts. What a relief it would be, we think, if only we could cut Christianity free, once for all, from the perplexities and uncertainties of history, if we could make an end of the weary and interminable controversies, which are yet inevitable so long as religious truth is made to depend on historical fact, and, as the phrase goes, put the ark of God somewhere where the Philistines cannot get at it!

[1] *Early Church History*, vol. i. p. 10.

[2] Quoted by Dr. Maldwyn Hughes in *London Quarterly Review*, April, 1911, p. 229.

Only bring the soul to see and acknowledge the timeless realities of religion, and we may sleep o' nights, let the critic do as he will with our four Gospels.

This way of putting things may seem to have some promise in it, and it is not without certain elements of undoubted truth. But it offers no real relief to a perplexed faith, unless that is to be called relief which would end its perplexity and its life together. A person afflicted with difficult breathing might as well seek to get rid of his trouble by soaring beyond the atmosphere as we may seek to simplify Christianity by severing it from history.[1] For, suppose the thing were done, what should we have left? Some fragments of a literature whose grace and beauty would still delight the student like the ruin of a Greek temple or an English abbey; some noble and ennobling thoughts of God; a pure and high ideal of human life. But all this, great and worthy though it be, is not what for nineteen centuries the Church and the world alike have agreed to call Christianity. The gospel claims to be a revelation of eternal truth through certain events of time; but if these turn out to be mere fictions, if we have and can have no certainty concerning them, what is left, beautiful and interesting as it may be, is not the gospel. 'Christianity,' it is no exaggeration to say, 'sinks or swims with the assertion that at a certain period of time a human personality appeared on the stage of history and was the Incarnate Son of God.'[2]

But, it is urged, the ideas of the gospel will remain,

[1] See Denney's *Jesus and the Gospel*, p. 375.

[2] Peake's *Christianity: its Nature and its Truth*, p. 143.

whatever becomes of its facts. But is this so certain? We let go the history in order to grasp more firmly the ideas; what if it should turn out that we need the history in order to guarantee the ideas? The string that holds a schoolboy's kite is the means by which it rises; cut the string, and the kite will pitch headlong to earth. Will it fare any better with some of our great religious ideas if we cut the cord of history?[1] Take, for example, the doctrine of the Divine Fatherhood. There, it may be said, is a truth which reigns and will continue to reign in its own right; why should we imperil its authority by any compromising alliance with the events of history? Well, but what is it, as matter of fact, that has gained for the idea of God's fatherly goodness its present sure place in men's minds? How, let us ask, did St. Paul reach his doctrine of the love of God? It was not simply the intuition of a large and loving heart that saw deep into the truth of things; it was not of the nature of a deduction from the facts of life and experience; still less was it the brilliant guess of a great religious genius; rather it was God's word concerning Himself spoken by Himself in Jesus Christ. And Paul believed in the love of God, not because Christ talked about it, not because He said, *When ye pray say, Father,* but because in Him he saw the divine love in being; in Him was made manifest the love of God. And as it was with the Apostle, so is it with ourselves. It is not the ideas of Jesus, it is not anything that Jesus ever said, that has made us sure of the love of God; it is Jesus Himself. It is in the Christ of history, the Christ of the four Gospels, in Him

[1] The illustration is Professor Peake's.

who wrought great miracles, who died for our sins, who rose again from the dead, it is in Him that we have seen the Father. The love of God of which we have any assurance is the love of God *which is in Jesus Christ our Lord*. And if we let go the fact of Christ, how long will the beliefs that are rooted and grounded in Him outlive the loss? 'I cannot see,' Huxley once wrote to Charles Kingsley, 'one shadow or tittle of evidence that the great unknown underlying the phenomena of the universe stands to us in the relation of a Father—loves us and cares for us as Christianity asserts.'[1] And if we only saw what Huxley saw, what else could we say? If we were shut up to his facts, would we not also be shut up to his conclusions? It is our appeal to the facts which Huxley could not see, the facts of Christian history, the facts of the Gospels, which saves and vindicates our faith. And it is worse than idle to tell us that we may let all these go, or hold them only with a slack hand, and still go on believing, as though nothing had happened, in the love and Fatherhood of God.

There is a still further question which cannot be ignored. Even supposing that the ideas remain after the facts which originated them have been sacrificed, will they work? I mean, will a Christianity of ideas divorced from the person of the historical Jesus do for men what Christianity came into the world to do? I may be told, perhaps, that questions of this kind are a sheer irrelevance, that what we have to do with is the truth or falsity of a particular view of the Gospel history, not the consequences which might follow from its

[1] *Life and Letters of Thomas Henry Huxley*, vol. i., p. 347.

adoption. In a sense, of course, this is true; consequences are nothing to the logic of an argument. But, as a great Christian teacher has reminded us, 'consequences bring home to us a quicker sense of the reality of what we are talking about. They are a bridle on idle and empty words. They lift a question out of the region of speculative interest and discussion; they make us understand that we are dealing with *things* and not *words* only.'[1] And when we are assured with light-hearted confidence that after all it does not matter, or does not matter much, whether the Gospel history be fact or fiction, it is well that we should remind ourselves of what is involved in the assertion. And is it not certain that, however it might be with a few select philosophic spirits, for the average man Christianity would cease to exist if it allowed its historical tradition to be indefinitely vapourized? Great indeed is the power of ideas; but, as Harnack says, all higher life is kindled by a person, and can only be maintained in communion with that person.[2] 'Ideas are often poor ghosts: our sun-filled eyes cannot discern them: they pass athwart us in their vapour and cannot make themselves felt. But sometimes they are made flesh: they breathe upon us with warm breath, they touch us with responsive hands, they look at us with sad, sincere eyes and speak to us in appealing tones: they are clothed in a living human soul, with all its conflicts, its faith, its love. Then their presence is a power, then they shake us like a passion, and we are drawn after them with gentle compulsion as flame is drawn

[1] Dean Church's *Human Life and its Conditions*, p. 80.

[2] Quoted in Principal Selbie's *Aspects of Christ*, p. 194.

to flame.'[1] How true this is we know full well, and the supreme illustration of its truth is to be found in the Christian history. Strike from it its central Figure; empty it of its great divine acts; reduce it to a series of doctrinal propositions; and, however great and worthy these may be, you have degraded Christianity into a nerveless altruism which will be as helpless against the selfishness and sin of mankind as a toy sword in a child's hand.

But, of course, we cannot have it both ways. We cannot claim that Christianity is a historical religion and at the same time deny right of way to the historical student. We cannot claim that the Gospels are genuine historical documents and then rail them off as a sacred enclosure. Wherever documentary witnesses are brought forward to establish the truth of some event of the past the critic has both his rights and his duties. Moreover, it is but natural that the severity of his tests should be proportioned to the significance of the events which the witnesses relate. 'The documents must be critically examined, the scholar must seek to discover their date, their authorship, their place of origin, and whether they incorporate older documents. If he comes to the conclusion that these older documents are present, he must seek as far as possible to disengage them and restore them to their original form. If he finds conflicting versions of the same event, he must attempt by a process of comparison to work back to the earlier stage of the tradition from which both originated.' Further, 'he must not only investigate the

[1] George Eliot's *Janet's Repentance*.

documents in which the story has come down to him; he must examine the intrinsic credibility of the story itself.'[1] And at the end of all this inquiry one of three things will happen: the story will stand successfully every test which the scholar applies to it; or it will completely break down; or, while breaking down in several details, in its main outlines it will remain unshaken. Thus we come back again to the question with which we began: how fares it with our faith concerning Christ? When criticism has had its perfect work, can we still worship Him as the Son of God and Lord of glory?

II

There are two points touching the interpretation of the historical Jesus concerning which there has been of late considerable discussion. In regard to one of these, the Virgin Birth, though the debate is still going on in full vigour, signs of agreement are not wanting; in regard to the other, the limitation of our Lord's knowledge, the debate would seem to be almost over. Let us take the second point first; and here it will be sufficient to indicate very briefly the conclusion to which Christian opinion appears to be slowly settling down.

Throughout many centuries, as Bishop Gore in a learned dissertation has pointed out, there was a fixed theological determination against the admission of a real growth in our Lord's human knowledge or a real ignorance in His human condition, such as

[1] Peake's *Christianity: its Nature and its Truth*, p. 141.

the Gospel documents describe. The dogmas of the Church, primarily intended as safeguards—the hedge rather than the pasture ground, repudiations of error rather than sources of positive teaching—came to be used as the positive premisses of thought. The truth about Christ's person was formed deductively and logically from the dogmas, and the Figure in the Gospels grew dim in the background.[1] But in our day the historical Christ, the Christ as He actually lived among men, has been discovered afresh. And when the facts were allowed to tell their own story, the theological figment of a Christ who needed not to ask nor to be told anything, to whose omniscient gaze all things, past, present, and future, were naked and laid open, fell straightway to the ground. The Christ of the Gospels is one who grew in knowledge as He grew in stature, who was tempted in all points like as we are, yet without sin, who expressed surprise because sometimes things turned out other than He had expected, who asked questions because He did not know and wished to know, and who said that there was a day and an hour known to none, neither to the angels nor to the Son, but to the Father alone. Unless, therefore, it would empty Christ's life of all reality, and degrade it to the level of an elaborate make-believe, theology had no alternative but to let the facts govern its logic, and confess that a Christ omniscient with the omniscience of Deity, familiar as He has been to the imaginings of men, was yet unknown to the evangelists to whom we owe the fourfold story of His earthly life.

Thus far the agreement among modern theologians

[1] *Dissertations*, pp. 166, 171.

is general. When we pass to particulars, it is but natural that differences should begin to manifest themselves, though here, too, the controversy is ceasing to be acute. Thus it is now admitted on all hands—the few protesting voices do but emphasize the general consent—that Christ's authority cannot be invoked to invalidate the findings of modern biblical criticism. If in His references to the Old Testament, in matters of authorship and the like, our Lord assumes a point of view which later investigation shows to be untenable, we no longer imagine that by an appeal to Him we can reverse the verdict of the facts; neither do we explain His language as an accommodation to the ignorance of His contemporaries; rather we see in it another illustration of the great word that *it behoved Him in all things to be made like unto His brethren.* In the same way, probably—though on this point there is greater divergence of view—we may explain Christ's language concerning the demoniacs of the New Testament. If, as seems most likely, these were really cases of epilepsy, lunacy, or other acute nervous disorders, diagnosed according to the fantastic notions of an unscientific age, we attribute nothing unworthy to Christ in supposing that it was part of His true humanity, that in this matter also He should think as others in His situation naturally thought. So, too, in regard to Christ's eschatological teaching. Christian scholars as pronounced in their evangelical sympathies as Dr. Denney and Dr. J. H. Moulton tell us quite frankly that we may accept without fear the view that it is to our Lord Himself that we must trace the general expectation of the first Christians concerning the

speedy consummation of all things. Such a conclusion, says Dr. Moulton, does nothing to 'shatter the credit of Him of whom every new age tells more clearly that He has words of eternal life.' 'After all, the foreshortening of history which made Him see that vivid future so near was only the inevitable condition of the real humanity which he took upon Him.'[1]

The matter must not detain us further now; suffice it to say (1) that we must maintain the limitations of the knowledge of Jesus, alike in the interests of a true Christology and of intellectual liberty; and (2) that all applications of the truth, to be wise and safe, must be reached through a careful inductive study of the facts of the Gospel story.[2]

With regard to the Virgin Birth of Christ it is perhaps too soon to speak with confidence, but the trend of what may be called liberal evangelical Christianity[3] appears to be towards this twofold

[1] From an essay read before the Free Church Council in March, 1911, and reported in the *Free Church Year-Book*, pp. 44–51. Dr. Denney's views are set forth in the review referred to in the first chapter of this book (see p. 7).

[2] The value to Christian thought of a frank recognition of New Testament teaching on this subject is well stated by Bishop Gore: 'There is no doubt,' he says, 'that the general teaching of the Catholic Church for many centuries about our Lord has removed Him very far from human sympathies, very much further than the Christ of the New Testament. The minimizing of the meaning of His manhood is (among other things) largely accountable for the development of an exaggerated devotion to His Mother and the saints. In proportion as the real human experiences, sufferings, and limitations of Christ during the period of His humiliation are forgotten and ignored, in that proportion men will go to seek human sympathy from on high in some other quasi-deified being. We must recover the strength which the Christian creed is meant to derive from a Christ made in all points like unto His brethren, apart from sin' (*Dissertations*, p. 205).

[3] In the English-speaking world, that is; of the state of opinion on the Continent one would need to use very different language.

conclusion: (1) that there are good and sufficient reasons for maintaining the Church's traditional belief concerning the manner of our Lord's birth; but (2) that the belief is in no sense fundamental to Christianity, and may without prejudice to any Christian interest be left an open question.

The reality of Christ's miraculous birth, as of any other of the miracles recorded of Him, is a question of evidence. But our estimate of the evidence will vary greatly according to the mental prepossessions with which we approach it. If nothing else concerning Christ has already started for us the question *Who then is this?*; if we think of Him as the best and wisest of men, not less than that, but also not more than that; if, in a word, there is for us no problem of the Person of Christ, then I think we may take it for granted that nothing in the narratives of the miraculous birth is likely to lead us to revise our judgement: the usual explanations of the story will be forthcoming, and there the matter will end. But if, as for the moment I must be permitted to assume, Christ has for us the significance which from the beginning He has had for Christian faith; if we see in Him one 'as divine as the Father and as human as ourselves,' then the evidence for the Virgin Birth, though lacking the victorious completeness of the arguments for the Resurrection, may yet with good reason be counted sufficient.

To begin with, there is the long unbroken tradition of the Christian Church. 'Everything that we know,' says Dr. Rendel Harris, 'of the dogmatics of the early part of the second century agrees with the belief that at that period the Virginity of Mary

was a part of the formulated Christian belief.'[1] And so has it continued to be to this day. To some minds this will appear conclusive: the authority of the Christian Church as a guide to religious truth is too deeply involved to admit of doubt. To others it will prove nothing. Yet, though we allow that questions of history cannot be settled by authority, the Christian mind is naturally and justly reluctant to believe that anything that the Church has received and taught as truth throughout the whole course of its history must now be surrendered as error.

We are on very different, and some will think much safer, ground in urging the general historical credibility of the evangelic tradition. We have two witnesses to the story of the Virgin Birth—our first and third Gospels. Now St. Luke's reputation as a serious and trustworthy historian has of late years, as is well known, been steadily growing. His claim to have *traced the course of all things accurately from the first* is admitted to be well founded. And the narrative of the miraculous birth is entitled to share in the enhanced consideration which his whole work to-day demands and receives at the hands of the scholar. Must not the character of the story, the impression which it makes on the mind of the reader, also be taken into account? If the story be true, Mary herself must be its ultimate source, and its virgin purity is explained. But if the story be not true, whence did it come? We know all too well the garish flaunting things that grow in the hot-house of man's thought when it busies itself with themes

[1] *Texts and Studies*, vol. i., No. 1, p. 25.

like this. Was it in that rank soil and stifling air that the white wonder of this story grew?

In the long run, however, as has been already pointed out, the credibility of the Virgin Birth will for us be conditioned mainly by the character of our belief in Christ. If He is to us what He has always been to Christian faith, we shall find no insuperable difficulty in the story of His birth. 'Who,' the question was once asked, 'would believe such a story concerning any other woman?' 'We all might,' was the quiet answer, 'if her child were another Jesus.' And the answer, simple as it is, goes to the root of the matter. The Virgin Birth is not to be discussed apart; like the miracles, it is part of a larger whole, and its credibility depends on its congruity with the history to which it belongs. It is the virgin life which makes credible the Virgin Birth. It is at least a not unlikely thing that He, who in His life was so separate from all others, may have been separate also in the manner of His entry upon it. And where this rational presumption is clinched by the evidence of the Gospels, the believer in the Virgin Birth may justly feel that he has solid ground to rest upon.

At the same time, the position which is given to this doctrine—or, to speak more accurately, which is denied to it—in the New Testament forbids us to reckon it among the essentials of Christian faith. Outside the first and third Gospels the New Testament has nothing to say concerning it. Multitudes of the first generation of Christians must have come to their full faith in Jesus as Son of God and Saviour of men without having so much as heard the wondrous story of His birth. Now,

while we may readily agree with writers like Bishop Gore and Dr. Orr that this silence is no argument against the positive evidence of the Gospel narratives, when they go on to insist that, in spite of it, the Virgin Birth is essential to a true doctrine of the Person of Christ, many will feel unable to follow them. How can anything be essential to Christian faith of which neither St. Paul nor Jesus Himself had anything to say?

It is greatly to be regretted that in the minds of so many the manner of Christ's birth has come to be bound up with the fact of His sinlessness, the one being regarded as in some way the seal and guarantee of the other. But, as Professor Peake says, is not the transmission of a sinful human nature as possible through one parent as through two?[1] And if Christ's sinlessness is made to depend on His birth of a virgin, what logical defence is left us against the Roman Catholic doctrine of the Immaculate Conception? Surely in this matter it is the preacher's wisdom to follow the example of the Apostles, and to keep the question of what Christ was wholly distinct from the other and quite different question of how, on the physical side, He came to be what He was. As Dr. Denney says, 'We cannot go wrong if we limit the fundamental confession of faith to the character in which Jesus presented Himself and was afterwards by His Apostles presented to the world, without introducing into it, as essential conditions or presuppositions of faith, matters of fact which had originally no such significance.'[2]

[1] *Christianity: its Nature and its Truth*, p. 178.
[2] *Jesus and the Gospel*, p. 405.

III

The foregoing are illustrations of the change of emphasis, or doctrinal re-statement that is called for by our modern study of the Gospels. But these things do not touch the substance of the preacher's message. Christ still remains—Sinless, Sovereign, Divine ; faith still has assurance of Him ; the great old affirmations are still valid, and they are still, to all who receive them, the power of God unto salvation.

To begin with, nothing that criticism can do can take from us our Gospels as sources of our knowledge of Jesus. In reading them we may be always sure that we are in contact with a real Person, of whom they give us real knowledge. This is not the same thing as to say that the narrative must be accepted at all points just as it stands. It is not God's way, as Principal Rainy used to say, to give us mathematical lines.[1] He has not given us mathematical lines about the canon of Scripture, nor the text, nor the interpretation, nor the details of the narratives ; yet concerning all these things

[1] *Life*, vol. ii., p. 114. For an illustration of this remark I may quote Dr. Denney again. Commenting on Luke's report of Christ's eating before His disciples after His resurrection (xxiv. 41–43), he says : 'Eating is a function which belongs to the reality of this life, but not to that of immortality ; and there does seem something which is not only incongruous but repellent in the idea of the Risen Lord eating. It makes Him real by bringing Him back to earth and incorporating Him again in this life, whereas the reality of which His resurrection assures us is not that of this life, but of another life transcending this. The eating is only mentioned by Luke, and when we consider the fact, which a comparison with the other Gospels renders unquestionable, that Luke everywhere betrays a tendency to materialize the supernatural, it is not too much to suppose that this tendency has left traces on his resurrection narratives too. But . . . to reject the eating is not to reject the resurrection life of Jesus, it is to preserve it in its truth as a revelation of life at a new level—life in which eating and drinking are as inappropriate as marrying or giving in marriage' (*Jesus and the Gospel*, p. 146).

we can be as sure as we need to be. 'No attempt,' says Dr. Moffatt, 'to understand the age of Jesus or the age of the Apostles will prosper if it uses the Gospels as absolutely achromatic documents.'[1] This is true, and this is just the business of criticism: to discover how far our view of the facts is coloured by the lens through which we see them; to make out, as Matthew Arnold would say, what, in the Evangelists' report of Jesus, is Jesus and what is the reporters. Of course, this is in no sense a problem peculiar to the study of the Gospels; it belongs to all historical study. If the Gospels are not 'absolutely achromatic,' neither is the History of Thucydides, nor Carlyle's *Life of Cromwell*. In each the contemporary or personal equation has to be taken into account. Yet just as, notwithstanding this, we are sure that Thucydides shows us the real Pericles, and Carlyle the real Cromwell, so may we be sure that the Gospels show us the real Jesus.

The ultimate ground of our confidence is in the Gospels themselves. Such sayings, such a life, as they record are their own best witness; they authenticate themselves. Let it be remembered that, in dealing with the Gospels, we are dealing with documents which, on any theory of their authorship and origin, enshrine the most priceless things in human life. Whence do they come? What account can we give of them? If behind them there is a real Person such as the Church has always believed in and worshipped, the question is answered. If we deny this, the problem is still with us awaiting a better solution. Airy talk about 'inventions'

[1] *The Historical New Testament*, p. 22 (footnote).

and the like does not help us one jot. Who were these inventors, and whence came they? The personality of Jesus stands out above His surroundings 'like a peak among low ridges.' His disciples were as little capable of inventing Him and His sayings as were the spectators in the Globe Theatre of writing the plays of Shakespeare. Nor is it a more hopeful way out of the difficulty to treat the Gospels as a conglomerate of poetry and piety, the net result of a slowly-developed 'Christ-myth.' The truth is we are here in the presence of a mystery of life which it is beyond the skill of literary analysis to explain. On this point some old words of Principal Rainy well deserve to be recalled: 'The man who hides from himself what Christianity and the Christian revelation are, takes the parts of it to pieces, and persuades himself that without divine interposition he can account for all the pieces. Here is something from the Jews and something from the Greeks. Here are miracles that may be partly odd natural events, partly nervous impressions, and partly gradually growing legends. Here are books, of which we may say that this element was contributed by this party, and the other by that, and the general colouring by people who held partly of both. In such ways as these Christianity is taken down and spread over several centuries. But when your operation is done, the living whole draws itself together again, looks you in the face, refuses to be conceived in that manner, reclaims its scattered members from the other centuries back to the first, and re-asserts itself to be a great burst of coherent life and light, centring in Christ. Just so you might

take to pieces a living tissue, and say there is here only so much nitrogen, carbon, lime, and so forth; but the energetic peculiarities of life going on before your eyes would refute you by the palpable presence of a mystery unaccounted for.'[1]

Further, and most important of all, the new knowledge which our time has won has thrown into sharper relief than ever the uniqueness of the Figure which the Gospels reveal.

Emerson speaks somewhere of the 'noxious exaggeration' with which, he says, Christianity has dwelt on the Person of Christ. And, however we may characterize it, the fact is undoubted—the mind of the Church has always been absorbed in Christ. And what is even more remarkable—and we should take care that the fierceness and frequency of the Church's controversies do not blind us to it—in one respect, at least, the Church has always known its own mind concerning Christ. Its difficulties have been rather with the defining and articulating of its faith than with the faith itself. It has known what it wanted to say, even when it did not know how best to say it. And never at any time in its long history has Jesus been to it simply the first of Christians and the best of men. Always it has held Him forth as the object of faith; always it has called on men not merely to believe *like* Him, but to believe *in* Him; always while recognizing in Him that which is explained by His connexion with mankind, it has seen in Him a something more which could only be explained

[1] New College Inaugural Address, 1874. My quotation is taken from Stalker's *Life of Jesus Christ*, p. 143. In Rainy's *Life* (vol. i., p. 286) the same passage appears in what looks like an earlier and less [illegible] form.

by a relation to God to which our own experience presents no parallel. This, I say, is and always has been the Church's conception of Christ; and this, too, is the conception which our earliest Christian documents after the freest critical handling justify and demand. We may, of course, set them aside altogether; but if we are to attach any credence whatever to the only records of Christ's life and teaching that we possess, then we know for certain that Jesus claimed to be, and by all His disciples was believed to be, the Son of God, the Redeemer of men, the Ruler of the world to come. Very briefly let me indicate the lines along which this statement can be made good.

A painter wishing to represent on his canvas a fire may do it in one of two ways. He may show us the fire itself, or simply its reflection on the faces of the spectators. Similarly, our impression of Christ's person may be received in two ways: directly and indirectly—directly from Himself, indirectly from His followers. What is the nature of this twofold impression? Jesus of Nazareth, Unitarianism roundly affirms, was a man 'like the rest of us.'[1] Now, right or wrong, indisputably this was not the faith of the men who gave us the New Testament and formed the society which Jesus founded. If, then, Unitarianism is right two questions imperatively demand an answer: How did the Church get itself born? How did the New Testament get itself written? If Jesus were but 'a man like the rest of us,' how did it come to pass that immediately after His death a society

[1] See E. Emerton's *Unitarian Thought*, quoted in *Expository Times*, May, 1911.

sprang up which has continued to this day, the chief bond of whose union has always been its belief that He was not like the rest of us? How did He manage so to impress Himself on His followers that, within less than a century of His birth, a book like the New Testament was written and received as the one authentic record of His life and teaching? To say that they were deceived by the ardour of their devotion pushes the difficulty a step further back, but does nothing to solve it. Enthusiasm has, indeed, often betrayed disciples into extravagant claims for their Master, which after-ages have declined to countersign; but the blunder of the first Christians, if blunder it was, is without a parallel in the history of mankind. What manner of man must He have been the impress of whose personality was of such a sort that even men who had drunk in monotheism with their mothers' milk worshipped Him as divine and trusted their souls to Him for ever? When we have regard to the character, the universality, and the results of their faith, is not the conclusion that Christ was *not* 'a man like the rest of us,' difficult as for some minds it may be, the least difficult alternative?

The testimony to Christ of His followers may be illustrated in another way. Call to mind some of the great sayings which the Gospels put into His lips: *He that loveth father or mother more than Me is not worthy of Me* (Matt. x. 37); *Come unto Me, all ye that labour and are heavy-laden, and I will give you rest* (Matt. xi. 28); *Heaven and earth shall pass away, but My words shall not pass away* (Mark xiii. 31); *All authority hath been given unto Me in heaven and on earth* (Matt. xxviii. 18). If

Jesus really said these things, or anything like them, we have no need of further witness; the loftiest claims of His disciples are justified out of His own lips. But, it may be asked, how can we be sure that these are His words? How do we know that they are not put into His lips by some worshipping disciple? But though there were nothing else to be said—and there is, of course, very much—is it not clear that though this were conceded we should have evaded one difficulty only to find ourselves brought to a stand by another equally great? For what must their thoughts of Him have been to whom, with no sense of unfitness, they could attribute sayings like these? We have still to explain how they came to see, in claims so august, the natural expression of His mind and will.

The same line of reasoning applies to the story of the Virgin Birth. Even if we were driven to admit that it is not history, that would not mean that it is therefore worthless. Historical or legendary, it is here, and though, of course, it would not have the same value as legend that it has as history, it would still bear witness to the unique impression left by the life of Jesus on the minds of His followers. One who in His life and in Himself was so unlike the rest of men—such at least the story must have meant—must have been unlike also in the manner of His birth. *The Holy Spirit*, said the angel to Mary, *shall come upon thee, and the power of the Most High shall overshadow thee: wherefore also that which is to be born shall be called holy, the Son of God* (Luke i. 35). Those who believed that the personality of Jesus originated in this unparalleled way must, as Dr. Denney says, have given Him an

unparalleled place in their faith.[1] And, for the moment, that is the only point with which we are concerned.

When from the apostolic testimony to Christ we turn to the testimony of Christ to Himself, we enter the very citadel of the Christian argument. This subject has of late years been very diligently explored, and nowhere with more scientific thoroughness and frankness than in Dr. Denney's great book, *Jesus and the Gospel*, to which reference has so often been made in these pages. Dr. Denney's aim is to show that the attitude to Christ which has always been maintained in the Church is, as the sub-title of the book indicates, 'justified in the mind of Christ,' and is indeed the only one which is consistent with the self-revelation of Jesus during His life on earth. The argument is, of course, cumulative in its character, and no summary can do justice to it; it must be studied as a whole. Two illustrations, however, may be given.

Let us take, first, the saying of Jesus recorded in Mark xiii. 32: *Of that day or that hour knoweth no one, not even the angels in heaven, neither the Son, but the Father.* This, as every one knows, is one of Schmiedel's now famous nine 'foundation-pillars for a truly scientific life of Jesus.' Its genuineness may be taken for granted, for it is one of the sayings which early Christianity might have wished to suppress, but would be under no temptation to invent. What, then, does it reveal concerning the mind of the Speaker? On the one hand, it is an absolute disclaimer, which must be accepted as it stands, of all knowledge whatsoever of the

[1] *Jesus and the Gospel*, p. 68.

time of the Second Advent.[1] But, on the other hand, the disclaimer is made in language that reveals, with equal emphasis, the Speaker's habitual consciousness of separateness from all other men. If, as Unitarianism asserts, Christ was but a man 'like the rest of us,' why did He not simply say what the rest of us under similar circumstances would have said: 'No one knows but the Father'? What to His own consciousness must this Man have been who, in the very act of declaring His limitations, thus set Himself over against 'the Father,' and apart from all others, as 'the Son'?

Most impressive of all is the testimony of Christ's sinlessness. If, writes St. John, *we say that we have no sin, we deceive ourselves, and the truth is not in us.* And to that saying every man's conscience adds its own Amen; the holier we are, the swifter our response. To this the lives of all the saints bear witness, but it will be sufficient to record the words of St. Paul. In one letter (1 Cor. xv. 9) he calls himself *the least of the apostles*; in another and later (Eph. iii. 8) he says he is *less than the least of all saints*; later still (1 Tim. i. 15) he declares he is *the chief of sinners.*[2] I do not pause just now to ask how it is that good men thus judge themselves; I simply note the fact that the holier they become the more unsparing is their self-condemnation, the more overwhelming their sense of the gulf which divides them from the all-holy God. But here

[1] Dean Church used to say that this was a text the ordinary explanations of which never satisfied him: 'They seem,' he said, 'to explain it away as much as any Unitarian gloss of St. John i. 1' (*Life and Letters*, p. 267).

[2] I assume, for the moment, without discussion, the Pauline authorship of 1 Timothy.

is the astonishing thing, that when we turn to Christ we are confronted straightway with an absolute reversal of all that experience has taught us to expect. That Jesus was a good man there is no need to argue; but, unlike all other good men, He has no sense of sin. In the lives of others penitence and confession mark all the steps in the long ascent; in the life of Jesus they find no place. It is not simply that others could not convict Him of sin; one here and there we may have known of whom that might be said[1]; what marks Him off from all others is this: He could not convict Himself. He is as separate from saints as He is from sinners; He stands apart, in a great mystery of aloneness into which none can enter. If, then, any one should say that the only difference between the Divine Man and the good man is that one is perfectly good, and the other is not, it would be sufficient to reply, 'And this is all the difference in the world.'[2] And because in His estimate of Himself Christ represents that difference, once more let it be said that if after all He was but 'a man like the rest of us,' no language could be strong enough to express the self-delusion in which He lived and died.

[1] This, for example, was how Dr. John Watson wrote of Henry Drummond: 'From his youth up he had kept the commandments, and was such a man as the Master would have loved. One takes for granted that each man has his besetting sin, and we could name that of our friends, but Drummond was an exception to this rule. After a life's intimacy I do not remember my friend's failing. Without pride, without envy, without selfishness, without vanity, moved only by goodwill and spiritual ambitions, responsive ever to the touch of God and every noble impulse, faithful, fearless, magnanimous, Henry Drummond was the most perfect Christian I have ever known or expect to see this side of the grave.'

[2] See Miss E. H. Rowland's little book, *The Right to Believe*, p. 115.

IV

The preacher, then, has no need to be afraid: criticism can never take away his Lord. In all essential things the Christ of the twentieth century and the Christ of the centuries are one. The old affirmations still stand. We can still worship Him, we can still proclaim Him as sinless, sovereign, and divine. This does not, of course, mean that we must seek to bind either ourselves or others by the old Christological formulas. Our business as preachers is not so much to secure assent to certain theological definitions of Christ as a certain attitude of soul towards Him. Not, indeed, that the definitions are superfluous. Intelligent men will always seek to find for their faith adequate intellectual expression. It is simply a question of order; and the first thing always is the soul's attitude, not the mind's definitions. Given this, we need never fear that theology will fail to come to its own. Thus, if one should confess his faith in some such words as these: 'Jesus Christ is the central fact of my spiritual life. I worship Him. I trust my soul to Him for time and eternity,'[1] will any one deny that such words have the root of the matter in them? And may not he who in sincerity and truth makes them his own justly ask his fellow Christians to be patient with him while he works out, as best he can, the theology that is implicit in them? So long as we give to Christ the place which He claims, and which all the writers of the New Testament give to Him, faith must

[1] Words reported to have been used by Rev. R. J. Campbell at the autumnal session of the Congregational Union, 1911.

be free to find the forms through which it can best express itself. As Dr. Denney puts it, we are bound to Christ, but we are not bound to any man's or any Church's rendering of what He is or has done.[1]

Look, for example, at the great historical creeds of the Church. Their long history, the character of the men to whom we owe them, the consummate skill with which they safeguard the truth, all entitle them to a reverent regard which they have not always received. Yet, after all, they are but the work of men's hands, and because they are human can never be final. Why should we suppose that it was given even to the great theologians of the fourth and fifth centuries to speak the last word concerning the mystery of our Lord's Person? Indeed, at the present moment, there are many signs even within the ranks of orthodox Christianity that the last word has not been spoken. On many sides one notes a growing dissatisfaction with the old two-natures theory of Christ's Person and a desire to transcend it. For one thing it defines Divinity too sharply in terms of opposition to humanity, and not, as is the modern way, in terms of affinity. Above all, it fails to do justice to the impression of unity left on our minds by the study of the Christ of the Gospels. The following words from the article on the Incarnation in Hastings' *Dictionary of Christ and the Gospels*, written by Dr. T. B. Kilpatrick, will show the direction in which many among us are slowly feeling their way: 'Christian thought must abandon the dualism which has so long impeded its efforts. It can never, indeed, emphasize too strongly the lowliness of man, both as

[1] *Jesus and the Gospel*, p. 382.

creature and as sinful creature, and must never, even in its most spiritual exercises, forget the reverence that is due from man to God. But it must reject as misleading all theories which presuppose a generic difference between the divine and the human natures. It must therefore reject the 'two-natures' doctrine of the Person of Christ, in the form in which it has hitherto prevailed; and must start in its study of Christ from the biblical point of view of the essential affinity of the divine and human natures,'[1] Does it mean that the Church is on the eve of a re-statement of its doctrine of the person of our Lord? I ask the question not to answer it, but only to point out again that a sharply defined Christology is one thing, the attitude of the soul which makes Christ central to faith is another and wholly different thing. For the one we search even the New Testament in vain; the other is writ large on its every page.[2] And it is, I repeat, the soul's attitude, not the mind's definitions, which is the great concern of the preacher.

Let us recall for a moment how the first disciples came to trust Jesus as Saviour and Lord. They did not begin by thinking of him as the Second Person in the Holy Trinity. Their thoughts of Him were determined by their own personal knowledge

[1] Vol. i., p. 812.

[2] 'When Christ constrained men to assume what we have called the Christian attitude to Himself, He constrained them at the same time to ask who the Person was to whom such an attitude was due. He constrained them to think what His relations must be to God and man, and even to the universe at large, to justify the attitude He assumed to them. But though these questions stirred more or less powerfully, as they must always do, the intelligence of Christians, it is impossible for any scientific student of the New Testament to say that all the early believers, or even all who were regarded in the Church as divinely empowered witnesses to the gospel, answered them in precisely the same way' (*Jesus and the Gospel*, p. 395).

and experience of Him. How, then, did their faith reach the height at which we see it all through the New Testament? It may be said that Jesus claimed to be divine, and that His disciples took Him at His word. But that is an obviously inadequate answer. Religious truth can never be communicated in that way; mere telling is nothing; and if Jesus had contented Himself with simply saying that He was divine, we may be quite sure that nothing would have come of it. What really happened was something quite different. Until towards the end of His life Jesus said but little directly about Himself; He manifested Himself to His disciples and He left the revelation to do its own work in their sincere and receptive souls. Two verses from the first Gospel will illustrate what appears to have been throughout the method of Jesus. At the close of the report of the Sermon on the Mount we read, *He taught them as one having authority, and not as their scribes* (vii. 29). At the close of the Gospel we read, *Jesus came to them and spake unto them, saying, All authority hath been given unto Me in heaven and on earth* (xxviii. 18). Here are a claim and an acknowledgement: a claim by Jesus, an acknowledgement by the people. And the point to observe is that the acknowledgement comes first. Jesus revealed His right to rule before He put forth His claim to rule. He made His authority felt within before He asserted it from without. *Never man so spake,* men said as they listened to His words concerning God and life and eternity. And when at last the august claim fell from His lips, *All authority is Mine,* it was with no surprise they heard Him:

He was but putting into words what their inmost souls had already acknowledged. And this, I say, was Christ's method throughout. He did not, when first He called His disciples to Him, confront them with any claim to be the Son of God; He did not ask them, *Who say ye that I am*? The time for that had not yet come. *Follow Me*, He said; and that was all He said; and it was enough. They followed; and following, their eyes were opened, till at last they could say, *We beheld His glory, glory as of the only-begotten from the Father*. He trained them, as Bishop Gore says, 'to trust Him with the sort of trust which can be legitimately given to God only,'[1] until in the end each could hail Him as *My Lord and my God*. And so to the first disciples the divinity of Jesus Christ was never a doctrine demonstrated by texts, and imposed by authority from without; it was rather an intuition of the soul, the sum of all Christ's words and works, 'the united and accumulated impression of all He was and did' upon their sincere and receptive souls.[1]

Do not these things point out the path for the preacher to-day? We desire to win men's faith for Christ. There is one way, and there is only one way in which we can do it: we must set forth Christ Himself. Theological propositions concerning Him will avail us nothing. Christ must make His own appeal—the appeal of His words and works, of His life and death. If faith is not won by these it will never be coerced by the propositions of the Creeds. The only confession of Christ as divine that has virtue in it is that which follows His work

[1] *The Incarnation of the Son of God*, p. 13.
[2] Denney's *Studies in Theology*, p. 25.

upon us, the intellectual interpretation of our own personal, spiritual relations to Him. Men must know themselves His debtors for salvation; they must throne Him as Lord, Lord of the will, Lord of the conscience, Lord of the affections; then when the voice from heaven proclaims *This is My beloved Son, hear ye Him,* all that is within them will leap forth to speak its great, glad, consenting Amen.

Many years ago it was the writer's privilege to hear Dr. A. B. Bruce defend himself in the annual Assembly of his Church against those who had attacked the teaching contained in his book, *The Kingdom of God.* Some of the speakers in the debate had complimented him on the 'intellectual vigour' of his book. This was his reply: 'I thank them for the compliment. But I must take leave to say that it is a small thing to me in connexion with such a work, to be complimented on my ability. The question is, Have I seen Christ and helped others to see Him? I would rather be one of the "babes" to whom the things of the Kingdom were revealed than one of the "wise and prudent" from whom they were hid. I would rather be one of the "unlearned and ignorant" men who, through companionship with Jesus, had become imbued with His Spirit than one of the Sanhedrin who, with all their learning, could see in Jesus and His companions only a band of bold, lawless, dangerous men, to be got rid of as soon as possible. I have been trying all my life to see Jesus, and to show Him; and if I have failed it will be small consolation to be told that I have written with considerable

ability.' But he had not failed. Seventeen years later one of the most gifted of Edinburgh's preachers published his first volume of sermons.[1] The dedicatory page bore these words: 'To the dear memory of . . . Alexander Balmain Bruce, through whom, to many and to me also was disclosed the glory of the Son of God.'

'To see Jesus and to show Him,' so to see and so to show Him that through us may be disclosed to many the glory of the Son of God—is it not to this end that the preacher is born, to this end that he came into the world?

[1] Dr. W. M. Macgregor's *Jesus Christ the Son of God.* Friends of the late Dr. Marcus Dods will recall the enthusiasm with which he always spoke of Dr. Macgregor's preaching; it finds repeated expression in his *Later Letters.*

VII

THE PREACHER'S STYLE

Though I did not occupy myself in learning what he [Ambrose of Milan] said, but only in hearing how he said it; yet, together with the words which delighted me, the things which I cared not for came also into my mind, for I was not indeed able to keep them apart. And whilst I opened my heart to admit the eloquence of his utterances, there gradually entered likewise a conviction of the truth of what he said.

St. Augustine.

CHAPTER VII

The Preacher's Style

In the preceding chapters we have been concerned with the *what* of preaching; in this and the following chapter something must be said regarding the *how*. It may seem perhaps a sudden descent from the heights to the depths to pass from the lofty themes which have engaged our attention thus far to the discussion of so mundane and secondary a matter as style. Some may even count the discussion an irrelevance and an impertinence. The preacher, they will say, is not an essayist or man of letters; what has God's prophet to do with the niceties and refinements of the literary craftsman? But secondary as the question undoubtedly is, it is not one which the preacher who really cares to win a hearing for his message can afford to ignore. Style is certainly not the first thing for a preacher to concern himself about, but no man has fulfilled his obligations as a minister of the gospel until he has laboured patiently and diligently, not only to know God's truth, but so to set it forth as to commend it to men's minds to-day. The growing fastidiousness of the pew, its love of what is fitting and comely, its shrinking from what is slovenly and uncouth—these things belong to the conditions in the midst of which we have to do our work. We may, if

we choose, affect to despise them, we may ignore them ; but the only result will be that we ourselves will be ignored, and the cause we represent will suffer loss. We cannot tell ourselves too plainly that if we expect men to give ear to us we must learn to speak to them in a language in which they can listen to us. The preacher needs to know both what to preach and how to preach. He must know the gospel, and he must know men ; but he must also know how to establish communications between men and the gospel. And what is this but another way of saying that he must give heed to the things that we sum up under the word 'style'?

I

In the past, it must be admitted, the alliance between faith and letters has lacked cordiality. Christian teachers and preachers have been both ready and able to contend for what they believed to be the faith of the gospel, but they have often been wofully indifferent to the form in which they have presented it for men's acceptance. And the fate which overtakes all such work has overtaken theirs. In the world of books nothing lives that lacks the saving grace of style. Does any one save an occasional enthusiast disturb the sleepers in that vast cemetery of the dead, the library of Puritan theology? However loud the trumpet blow, we know that these will never rise again. The sermons of the eighteenth century, Sir Leslie Stephen says, may be divided into three classes, dull, duller,

dullest.[1] And if this be counted the judgement of an adversary, we may hear Principal Caird, who declares that 'the pattern sermon of the Georgian era seems to have been constructed almost expressly to steer clear of all possible ways of getting human beings to listen to it.'[2] At the beginning of the nineteenth century we find John Foster giving as one chief reason for what he calls 'the aversion of men of taste to evangelical religion,' the barbarous dialect in which the principles of that religion were so often exhibited. Why, he asks, use the singularity of littleness to draw attention to the singularity of greatness, and give an uncouthness of mien to a beauty that should attract all hearts? He complains, too, of Christian books which bear the marks of learning, correctness, and an orderly understanding, and by a general propriety leave but little to be censured; but which display no invention, no prominence of thought or living vigour of expression, in which all is flat and dry as a plain of sand. 'Though the author has a rich, immeasurable field of possible varieties of reflection and illustration around him, he seems doomed to tread over again the narrow space of ground long since trodden to dust, and in all his movements appears clothed in sheets of lead.' And then there are the 'mock-eloquent writers,' unable to say a plain thing in a plain way, with their gaudy verbosity, their glare and bombast, their noisy emptiness which the ignorant mistake for thunder, but which is really no more than the rumbling of a cart. 'On the whole,' he concludes,

[1] *English Thought in the Eighteenth Century*, vol. ii., p. 337.

[2] Quoted in Dr. John Brown's *Puritan Preaching in England*, p. 206.

'a profound veneration for Christianity would induce the wish that after a judicious selection of books had been made the Christians also had their Caliph Omar and their General Amrou.'[1]

During the century which has passed since Foster wrote, faith and humanism have drawn nearer together, and much has been done to remove the reproach of which he so justly complained. But much still remains to be accomplished. Books are still issued from the religious press whose style is as joyless and arid as a Russian steppe. Men who dedicate themselves to the service of 'the queen of the sciences' ought surely to be mindful of the livery they wear; but we still have among us theologians of great gifts and immense industry who dress like hodmen. Take, for example, that well-known and useful series Clark's *Foreign Theological Library*. Could anything be more repulsive than the strange jargon which is so often for the English reader the last result of so much industry and learning? I think I could name at least one volume in that library whose publication in its present form is almost actionable! Quite recently on a long railway journey I had as travelling companions Hawthorne's *Scarlet Letter* and a very suggestive and stimulating work by a well-known English theologian. The latter is a man of remarkable power, with a real message to his time, but unfortunately with no corresponding gift of expression, and with an almost wanton disregard of the literary sensitiveness of his readers. It was the awkward, lumbering gait of a village clown

[1] Foster's *Essays* (Bohn's edition). The whole essay entitled 'The Aversion of Men of Taste to Evangelical Religion' will well repay reading.

in contrast with the strength and grace of a Greek athlete. The English theologian spatters his target all over with bullets before he hits the bull's eye; the great American says precisely what he means to say, and says it in clean, bright sentences which leave on the mind an unforgettable impression. The contrast reminded one of the game of nail-driving with which passengers on ship board sometimes amuse themselves; what a skilful workman will accomplish in two or three strong, deft strokes, the bungling amateur does badly in a dozen. And who has not suffered under sermons which, because the preacher did not know words, jarred all one's nerves with their crude colours and harsh discords; or, because he had never laboured to be concise, were full of sprawling, broken-backed sentences which came to an end no man knew how; or, because he had never learned to marshal his thoughts in due order, like Elisha's servant went no whither?

And yet, surely, if there are any themes which might have been expected to impart some degree of dignity and elevation to a speaker's or a writer's exposition of them, they are those which belong to the calling of the Christian teacher and preacher. What concord can the English Bible have with aught that is slipshod and mean? When we remember what manner of book the Bible is, how its words 'break into the dull round of common life like a shaft of sunlight on a cloudy day, or a strain of solemn music heard in a mean street,'[1] what can be more unseemly than the vulgar speech and incredible anecdote which have so often been its ignoble garniture? Against all such John Watson's protest was

[1] J. G. Frazer's *Passages from the Bible*, p. x.

not too strong: 'It is a species of profanity; it is an act of intellectual indecency.'[1] Nor need we fear that the preacher who gives heed to these secondary things will be tempted to exalt them to the first place in his ministry. He will not take less thought for his gospel because he has learned to take more for the form in which he proclaims it. Was William James a less competent psychologist because he was also a lucid and vigorous writer? Was Professor Huxley's science less trustworthy because in his hands it became as fascinating as a romance? Did Gibbon the man of letters take away aught from Gibbon the historian? Nor, again, need we fear that attention to style will weaken the force of a preacher's appeal to the simple and unlettered. Few writers command so wide an audience alike of the learned and the simple as Tennyson; yet the whole range of English literature can show no more perfect literary artist, none more fastidious in his choice and use of words. And the preacher who will care for these things, provided he have the root of the matter in him, will find that, while he has lost none, he has gained many to whom others less careful will appeal in vain.

It has often seemed to me that one of the minor matters in which John Wesley has not yet had full justice done to him is this matter of style. A literary artist Wesley certainly was not, and he himself would have been the first to resent the phrase. To live and labour with words, in the fashion which R. L. Stevenson, for example, has described,[2] would have seemed to him but elegant trifling. 'As for

[1] *Life*, by Sir W. Robertson Nicoll, p. 111.

[2] *Memories and Portraits*, p. 57.

me,' he says, 'I never think of my style at all; but just set down the words that come first. Only when I transcribe anything for the press'—and the qualification should not be forgotten—'then I think it my duty to see every phrase be clear, pure, and proper.'[1] Nevertheless, if Wesley was not a conscious artist, waiting for the fit word, coining like a cunning workman the happy phrase, style was with him an instinct like the feeling for personal cleanliness. Mr. Augustine Birrell has indeed declared that 'as a writer' Wesley achieved no distinction,[2] but most discerning readers of the *Journal* will agree rather with Edward FitzGerald, who seems never to have tired either of reading the book or commending it to his friends: 'If you don't know it,' he writes to one, 'do know it. . . . It is remarkable to read pure, unaffected, and undying English, while Addison and Johnson are tainted with a style which all the world imitated!'[3] Altogether, there are few religious authors whose writings will serve better to enforce what is the main contention of this chapter that it is worth a preacher's while taking any trouble to be orderly, lucid, and precise.

[1] *Works*, vol. xiii., p. 417.

[2] See his otherwise very generous appreciation reprinted in P. L. Parker's abridged edition of Wesley's *Journal*.

[3] *Letters of Edward FitzGerald*, vol. ii., p. 59. Mr. Thomas Seccombe makes an interesting comparison between the writings of Wesley and the *Dispatches* of Wellington. 'Both,' he says, 'show remarkable literary power; both go straight to the mark; and both as means to a direct practical end, are striking less from their intrinsic interest than as examples of heroic force of will' (*The Age of Johnson*, p. 125).

II

Assuming, then, the importance to the preacher of the question of style, we may go on to note certain qualities of speech which he will do well deliberately to cultivate. And at the outset we must remember that the aim of the preacher is effective speaking rather than excellent writing. The distinction is of the first importance, though it does not appear to be always kept in mind. Thus, in some eminently wise and timely counsels recently addressed to ministers I find the following: 'In the first years of your ministry, at least, write much, and if you can, learn a style. For this purpose there is no such teacher as Burke. The grand style in our day, the style of Dale and Morley, has been almost entirely based upon Burke.'[1] Of the glory of Burke, or the extraordinary powers of his distinguished disciples, there is no need to speak; the question is whether the 'grand style' is the best for the preacher, and on this point we are fortunate in possessing the judgement of Morley and Dale themselves. 'Though it is not wrong to say of Burke that as an orator he was transcendent, yet,' Morley writes, 'in that immediate influence upon his hearers which is commonly supposed to be the mark of oratorical success, all the evidence is that Burke generally failed. . . . Perhaps the greatest [speech] that he ever made was that on conciliation with America; the wisest in its temper, the most closely logical in its reasoning, the amplest in

[1] From an address to the students of New College, Hampstead, by Sir W. Robertson Nicoll, and reported in the *British Weekly*, June 29 and July 6, 1911.

appropriate topics, the most generous and conciliatory in the substance of its appeals. Yet Erskine, who was in the House when this was delivered, said that it drove everybody away, including people who, when they came to read it, read it over and over again and could hardly think of anything else.' The spoken discourse suffered from the very qualities which made it literature. Burke dwelt too much on the generalities that lent force and light to his view, and not enough on the arguments and facts that bore directly on the special issue before him. He neglected that generous use of the commonplace without which no man can hope to conquer a great audience. 'The emotion to which he commonly appealed was that too rare one, the love of wisdom, and he combined his thoughts and knowledge in propositions of wisdom so weighty and strong, that the minds of ordinary hearers were not on the instant prepared for him.'[1] There was a corresponding defect in the style of Dale's preaching, his own consciousness of which in later years grew very keen: 'The word,' he said, 'which has been often used to denote what critics regarded as the excellence of my preaching and speaking really suggested the qualities in which both had been defective, and the preaching more than the speaking—"stateliness." That is not the characteristic of effective speaking;

[1] *Burke* (English Men of Letters series), pp. 208–210. Cp. C. A. Vince's *John Bright*: 'It is usual to ascribe Burke's failure to keep the ear of the House of Commons to some defect of that body—its stupidity or its prejudice. But many admirers of Burke will admit, if they are pressed, that it is not easy to read one of his speeches through at a sitting. We read a few pages with immense admiration; but soon the ear and the mind are surfeited of his grand manner, and we can understand how those magnificent sentences failed of their due effect because they fell on ears wearied by the strain of so much highly-coloured eloquence' (p. 212).

and it suggests a whole set of intellectual, ethical, and spiritual elements which account for failure. I think,' he continues, 'that in the sermons of the last two Sundays, the "stateliness" has disappeared, and that there has been more of brotherly access—intellectual and, if I may so put it, rhetorical access—to the people. The intellectual quality has not, I think, been inferior to what I have usually reached, but on the whole higher; but the "stateliness" has gone. In preparation I aimed at more freedom, and in preaching God gave it me.'[1] When a man is writing no harm is done if the construction and arrangement of the argument be such that the full import of it is not obvious to every reader at the first glance. The reader has the book in his hand, and at any moment he may pause and go back and make sure that he sees clearly the path by which he is being led. But with the speaker nothing of the kind is possible. He must carry his hearers with him at every step, or his chance is lost. He has the passing moment only in which to do his work. Then, while he is speaking, then or not at all, conviction must be wrought and the end attained. Let this simple fact be fully grasped, and it will go far to suggest the qualities of speech most essential to the work of the preacher.

1. First of all, I would name *simplicity*. In Morley's *Life of Gladstone* a number of suggestions may be found which the great statesman once proffered to a correspondent on the art of speaking.

[1] *Life*, by his Son, p. 592. 'In my own estimation,' wrote one of Dale's lifelong friends and most intelligent hearers, 'he always ranked higher as a teacher than as a preacher of the truth. If I read a sermon which I had previously heard him preach, it always proved superior to what was expected' (Ib.).

This is the first of them: 'Study plainness of language, always preferring the simpler word.'[1] Gladstone himself, it must be acknowledged, was a frequent offender against his own rule. Yet this surely is the essence of all style (at least for the speaker) to say what you mean as simply, directly, and forcibly as possible. Young preachers should not be deceived by the vogue of writers like Browning and Meredith. Both are undoubtedly great writers; but their greatness owes nothing to their obscurity; in the long run it may even be eclipsed by it. On the other hand, a style like Newman's, with its perfect lucidity 'showing the very shape of the thought within,' is the far-shining goal towards which we all may strive. What can be more vexing to a hearer than to catch brief glimpses of a preacher's thought through flying clouds of speech, or to have to hunt amid a tangled web of words for the truth which he is there to make clear and compelling to all men's minds?

But the style to which beginners most easily fall a victim is the florid, turgid, 'Asiatic' style, as Matthew Arnold calls it, the barbarously rich and overloaded style. This is the style of those who think that long words, sonorous phrases, and profuse decoration are the signs of superior intelligence. Yet it would be unjust to suggest that it always springs from ignorance and vanity. With many it is due to nothing worse than the desire to be impressive and emphatic. But whatever the motive, it is always a blunder. Nothing is so impressive as simplicity, and nothing so surely fails to be emphatic as over-emphasis. It is one of the first rules of all good

[1] Vol. i., p. 92.

speaking, as of all good architecture, that you must ornament your construction, not construct your ornamentation; and perhaps there are few things under which to-day an intelligent congregation more quickly grows restive than the words of a man who is manifestly concerned not so much with what he is saying as how he is saying it. A speaker's style should be like a woman's dress, comely and befitting, lending grace and dignity to the thoughts which it clothes, but not calling attention to itself either because of its shabbiness or its showiness. Here, again, I will venture to quote John Wesley: 'I dare,' he said, 'no more write in a *fine style* than wear a fine coat. But were it otherwise, had I time to spare, I should still write just as I do. I should purposely decline what many admire, an highly ornamental style. I cannot admire French oratory: I despise it from my heart. . . . Let who will admire the French frippery, I am still for plain sound English.'[1]

We may think Wesley a good deal less than just to the oratory of France; but on the main question most wise judges will endorse his trenchant words. At the same time, it should be said, a simple style is not the same thing as a barren, meagre style. You may have simplicity the most perfect, and with it you may have, as in Newman,

[1] *Works*, vol. vi., p. 186. See also Wesley's *Letter to the Reverend Mr. Furley*: 'We,' he says, 'if we think with the wise, yet must speak with the vulgar. We should constantly use the most common, little, easy words (so they are pure and proper) which our language affords. When I had been a member of the University about ten years, I wrote and talked much as you do now. But when I talked to plain people in the castle or the town I observed they gaped and stared. This quickly obliged me to alter my style, and adopt the language of those I spoke to. And yet there is a dignity in this simplicity which is not disagreeable to those of the highest rank' (vol. xiii., p. 417).

colour, music, strength, fire. Just as the consummate loveliness of Salisbury Cathedral is said to have been gained in some mysterious way without the use of ornament, so a speaker learns at last that perfect beauty of speech is but another name for the unsought result of perfect simplicity.

2. But something more than lucidity of language is needed; there must be also *lucidity of thought and arrangement*. I remember listening some years ago to a very gifted English preacher. There was no fault to be found with his language; a child might have understood every word of it. Yet the sermon was obscure throughout. I was never sure that I was on the track of the preacher's thought. While he was speaking I could not see whither he was leading us. When he had finished there was no well-defined path over which I could look back. Shall I confess my sympathy with those who feel the same difficulty in reading Bishop Westcott? There are, of course, subjects concerning which a writer can only suggest; he cannot define. A peak 'haze-hidden,' shadowy shapes 'now looming and now lost,' are all that he or we can see. Yet who, with Westcott's books open before him, has not sometimes sighed for a wind to scatter the golden haze and show us once more the firm earth and the clear sky?[1] Another variety of the obscure style has been very aptly described as 'fireworks in a fog.' Of this the classic example is Emerson at his worst. 'Can you tell me,' asked one of his neighbour, while

[1] Mr. G. W. E. Russell tells a wicked story of a letter written by Canon Liddon one dark Christmas: 'London is just now buried under a dense fog. This is commonly attributed to Dr. Westcott having opened his study window at Westminster' (*Collections and Recollections*, ch. xvii.).

Emerson was lecturing, 'what connexion there is between that last sentence and the one that went before, and what connexion it all has with Plato?' 'None, my friend, save in God!'[1] This kaleidoscopic style, with its abrupt transitions, its strange disarray, its bewildering inconsecutiveness, is familiar to us all. Every year sermons are preached, books are published, rich with a profusion of bright, true things, but with the curse of disorder over them all, till one is as puzzled to know what this has to do with that, or both with the whole, as was the listener to Emerson's lecture on Plato. That kind of impression no preacher ought ever to leave on his hearers. Pyrotechnic displays are well enough in their way, but to a lost man on a dark road the humblest lantern is of more use than the most brilliant sky-rocket. And a style which dazzles but does not illuminate is strangely out of place in one whose work it is to give light to them that have missed their way and walk in the night. 'Clearness, in particular,' said Wesley, 'is necessary for you and me.'

3. Another quality essential to effective pulpit speech is *concisencss*. If we were discussing the question of style from the point of view of good literary art this, of course, would be granted at once. 'In literature,' says Pater, 'the true artist may be best recognized by his tact of omission. . . . All art does but consist in the removal of surplusage.'[2] 'If,' says R. L. Stevenson, 'there is anywhere a thing said in two sentences that could have been as clearly and as engagingly and as forcibly said in one, then it's amateur work.'[3] But, it may be

[1] J. Morley's *Miscellanies*, vol. i., p. 314.
[2] *Appreciations*, pp. 18, 19.
[3] *Letters*, vol. ii., p. 93.

urged again, the preacher is not an artist, he is an advocate, whose business it is to convince his jury and win his case. If the rules of good art will help him to do that, well and good; if not, let him sacrifice them without a murmur. When, on one occasion, Mr. Gladstone was about to reply in debate in the House of Commons, he turned to his chief, Sir Robert Peel, and said, 'Shall I be short and concise?' 'No,' was the answer, 'be long and diffuse. It is all-important in the House of Commons to state your case in many different ways, so as to produce an effect on men of many ways of thinking.'[1] And may not diffuseness sometimes be as necessary for the preacher as for the statesman, and for the same reasons? There is, of course, truth in this. On the other hand, it must be remembered that a tiresome prolixity is the pulpit's besetting sin, and that even in the House of Commons a business-like brevity is insisted on to-day such as would have astonished the statesmen of Gladstone's youth. In a previous chapter I have ventured to protest against the occasional unreasonableness in this matter of the pew; yet are not preachers themselves in some degree to blame for it? An Anglican clergyman is reported to have said concerning a well-known divine of his own Church that he never uses one word where five will do. Can we wonder that weary congregations refuse any longer to follow us across these wordy wastes? We may sigh for the spacious days of the past, when the preacher could turn the hour-glass and still hold bravely on his way; we may point our epigrams against a 'tabloid age' which wants all its knowledge packed

[1] *Life*, vol. i., p. 92.

and made portable; we may even declare, as one impatient preacher recently did, that 'a Christianity of short sermons is a Christianity of short fibre'[1]; but the fact still remains that our work, if it is to be done at all, must be done under the conditions of the present. To ignore them, or to rebel against them, is simply to leave ourselves without access to the minds of the men of our own time. For better or for worse, the day of the long sermon is gone. The modern preacher must learn to be brief, terse, compact. And when he has learned that hard lesson, perchance he himself will be astonished to discover how little he has really lost, how much it is still possible to accomplish even within the narrower limits which modern conditions impose.

4. And to lucidity and conciseness the preacher must add *dignity*. Let me hasten to say, however, that when I speak of dignity I do not mean dignity of the stiffly brocaded sort, the dignity that suggests gowned beadles, rustling robes, and velvet cushions, and which is but another name for decorous dullness; I mean rather the simple natural dignity which befits the high and sacred themes with which the preacher deals; which you may find equally amid the quiet simplicities of a Quaker meeting-house and the solemn pomp of a great cathedral; and which, wherever you find it, is at war with all that is vulgar and slovenly in the house of God. Of all bad pulpit styles the smart, flippant, jocular, is surely the worst. Wherever it prevails it means inevitably the cheapening and degrading of religion. Nothing kills reverence in the pew like buffoonery

[1] P. T. Forsyth's *Positive Preaching and Modern Mind*, p. 110.

in the pulpit ; and when reverence is lost all is lost. I do not forget the desperate urgency of our problems —our crowded city streets, our empty or half-empty city churches—which sometimes lead earnest men to defend and do desperate things. But there are successes that are worse than defeats. I do not forget the stiff and pompous unreality under which the gospel has been often wellnigh stifled. But the remedy lies not in clap-trap, but in manly directness and simplicity. And never is a preacher more grievously astray than when he thinks to catch the common people with the bait of vulgar speech. They may use it themselves, they may expect it from others about them, but they do not expect it from him ; and, unless my own observation has altogether misled me, they will be as ready to resent it as they will be quick to detect it. On this matter I know no worthier object-lesson than is to be found in the speeches of John Bright. They were addressed—I refer now to those delivered not in the House of Commons but throughout the country—to immense audiences of men, most of whom were not even voters, and at a time when the educational opportunities of English working men were far fewer than they are to-day. And what do they show us? That a man's gifts of exposition and exhortation, his knowledge, force, indignation, humour, pathos, lose nothing of their power to move even the most unlettered, because they are linked with dignity and purity of speech. Before whatever kind of audience a high and noble seriousness is always the best ally alike of the statesman and the preacher.

III

Assuming, then, that these are the qualities of speech most necessary to the work of a preacher, how shall a beginner set about making them his own? The answer lies in a single word—work, work, work. If there be any short cuts and easy methods I do not know them. It was said of Michael Angelo that he used to carve statues, 'not like our timid sculptors, by modelling the work in clay, and then setting a mechanic to chisel it, but would seize the block, conceive the image, and at once, with mallet and steel, make the marble chips fly like mad about him, and the mass sprout into form.'[1] Well, genius can take its own way, and laugh to scorn the rules by which smaller men must live; but the smaller man, if he is to have anything to show besides much spoiled marble and many chips, must multiply his smaller gifts by infinite toil. 'Thou, O God,' said another great Italian, Leonardo da Vinci, 'sellest all good things at the price of labour.' Here also the saying holds, *Narrow is the gate and straitened the way*, and he who would enter in must *strive*. Our fathers used to speak sometimes of 'painful' preachers, meaning thereby not preachers who caused pain, but who took pains.[2] And as Trench caustically remarks, if we had more 'painful' preachers in the old sense of the word, that is, who took pains themselves, we should have fewer

[1] Charles Reade's *Cloister and the Hearth*, ch. xcv.

[2] 'Oh the painfulness of his preaching,' says Thomas Fuller of some famous divine lately dead. Speaking of Knox, we read in an old Scottish writer: 'A single-hearted and painful Christian much employed in parliament and public [illegible]' Quoted in Dr. Alexander Mitchell's *Scottish Reformation and Scottish Life, Correspondents*, p. 104).

painful ones in the modern sense, who 'cause' pain to their hearers.[1]

Let it be understood that in urging toil on the young preacher, I am doing so, not at all that he may attain a distinguished literary style, but only in order that his speech may be stamped with those qualities of lucidity, conciseness, and dignity of which I have already spoken. And the fact that I would have him lay to heart is this, that these things are to be had only at the price of long and patient labour. 'I want,' writes Mr. A. C. Benson, 'more homeliness, more simplicity, more directness in sermons.' 'And so,' murmurs the pew, 'so say we all.' But neither the pew nor the pulpit seems to realize that, as Mr. Benson says, these qualities of expression are not only the result of being a homely, simple, and direct character, but are a matter of long practice and careful art.[2] And yet is not this what all who have attained are always telling us? 'The trouble with you young fellows,' Mr. Chamberlain is reported to have said once to some of his younger political associates, 'is that you don't take enough pains with your speeches.' It was, we may be sure, the word of experience. The crisp, incisive sentences of Chamberlain's great speeches, with their steely strength and diamond-like brightness, were possible only to one who had laboured much and very much at the difficult art of clear and exact expression. The same is true of Professor Huxley. All the world is familiar with his unrivalled powers of lucid exposition; and he won them by constant labour

[1] *English, Past and Present*, p. 306.

[2] *The Upton Letters*, p. 226.

deliberately directed to this end: to say exactly the thing he meant without confusion and without obscurity. Sometimes, he told a French correspondent, he re-wrote his essays half a dozen times before he could get them into a shape that satisfied him.[1] I have referred above to the strength and beauty of Newman's prose. And here again we find the same end kept steadily in view, the same patient labour to attain it. 'I think,' he says, 'I never have written for writing's sake; but my one and single desire and aim has been to do what is so difficult, viz., to express clearly and exactly my meaning.' And now comes the significant confession: 'I have been obliged to take great pains with everything I have written, and I often write chapters over and over again, besides innumerable corrections and interlinear additions.'[2]

Toil, patient and unremitting, this is the first condition of success. But the student may very naturally ask for some further and more definite counsel. What exactly should he do? I reply, he must read more and he must write more. And when I say he must read more, I am not thinking of what may be called his professional reading. Indeed, it is the predominance of that kind of reading that is partly to blame for the preacher's literary shortcomings. Dr. John Brown complains of the writers of his own profession that, with a few signal exceptions, they write ill; they are, he says, slovenly, diffuse, often obscure, and curiously

[1] *Life and Letters*, vol. i.; p. 429; vol. iii., p. 202.

[2] Has not Mr. A. C. Benson overlooked this passage when, referring to Newman's simplicity of style he calls it, 'not the result of labour, but of pure instinctive grace'? (*Upton Letters*, p. 22). It is clear that to his great natural gifts Newman superadded ungrudging labour.

involved. And he gives these two reasons: first, the enormous amount of merely professional knowledge a man is expected to master before he writes on any subject, and the absorbing nature of the new methods; secondly, and as a consequence, the ignorance of general literature, and the much less association by men of medicine with men of letters now than in olden times.[1] It is a caution which the preacher needs even more than the physician. No man will ever learn either to speak well or to write well who does not learn to keep good literary company. Only thus can the ear be taught to distinguish, and a habit of mind be created which shrinks, as by an instinct, from all that is flashy and unreal. When some one once asked the editor of the *British Weekly* what he should do in order to increase his mastery of the English language, the answer which he received was: 'Learn by heart *The Idylls of the King*.' To a student with a poor verbal memory, this may well seem a counsel of perfection; nevertheless, it points in the right direction, and it is confirmed by the experience of all good writers and speakers. When Dean Church, one of the most winning religious writers of the nineteenth century, was invited to expound the secrets of good writing, he modestly disclaimed any special knowledge of the subject; but one sentence of his reply brings us very near to the heart of the whole matter. 'Where one's stock of words comes from,' he said, 'I cannot tell. But I suppose they come if one reads with care good English. Shakespeare, Wordsworth, Burke, Walter Scott, Defoe (*Robinson Crusoe*), Goldsmith were, as far as I can

[1] *Horae Subsecivae*, vol. i., p. 345.

remember, the books I used to value, as giving, besides their thoughts, the most delightful and striking ways of saying them.'[1] All which, being interpreted, means that the student for the ministry must give more heed to English literature. No one will suspect Dr. James Denney of under-estimating the importance of theological study, but he does not hesitate to express the conviction that 'a wider and sounder knowledge of that literature, and a power of self-expression owing something to it, are of more value for the work of the ministry than much that we gain from what are considered distinctly professional studies.'[2] Should any one be in doubt as to the wisdom of this judgement he may be confidently recommended to put himself through a short course of reading in the various forms of students' exercises.

In the choice of his literary masters the student may be left pretty much to his own bent. Only let him choose the masters, and he cannot go wrong. Each has his own characteristic excellence, and from each he may learn some new and needed lesson. The sententious brevity of Bacon, the flexibility and ease of Cowper and Goldsmith, the majesty of Milton and Burke, the clearness as of crystal of Arnold and Newman, the perfume and colour of Stevenson and Pater—all are there for the instruction and enrichment, first of his mind and then of his ministry. Let him take, for example, one of John Bright's great speeches, or a volume of Stevenson's essays, or a book like Hawthorne's *Scarlet Letter*, and let him read slowly and carefully, asking why

[1] *Life and Letters*, p. 326.

[2] 'The Education of a Minister,' *London Quarterly Review*, July, 1904, p. 16.

this word is used and not that, noting words which he himself rarely or never uses, letting his ear delight itself in the rhythmic beat of the sentences; and it will not be long before he will begin to feel his own growing mastery of the great instrument through which his work has to be done. And among his many books, let him not forget that the English Bible is the first book, alike for the student of letters and the student of religion, and that he who has long nurtured his mind on it will have little need to take counsel with any man concerning a preacher's style.

And then to his much reading the student must add much writing. Indeed, during the early years of his ministry he cannot well write too much. I do not mean that he should write in order to read or recite what he has written, but as a part of his necessary mental drill. And, therefore, it is of no use to 'write extempore.' A man must work hard at his writing, and always—again I say it—with this end in view, not that he may win for himself the reputation of a skilled literary craftsman, but that when he speaks he may immediately commend the truth of the gospel to the mind and conscience of all who hear him. It is a task of self-discipline which he will often be tempted to shirk, and as often perhaps from worthy as from unworthy motives; but let him hold himself to it, and he will know, long before the end, that he has not spent his strength for naught.

And yet, after all, a preacher's style, like all else about his work, will be determined in the long run more by what he is than by anything that he can learn from books or teachers. Buffon's famous

saying, *Le style c'est l'homme même*—style is the man himself—remains still the truest word on the matter. The elements that go to the making of a man's style are not merely literary and intellectual; there is a subtle but inseparable ethical element, a certain quality of soul, which diffuses itself through all his words like a delicate aroma, which fashions them as the swift touch of the potter the plastic clay. Given a great sincerity of soul, a pure and passionate purpose, a sense of the vast horizons and solemn heights of the gospel, and these will burn away all that is false and unreal; they will give feet and wings to our poor limping words; they will clothe even our common speech with a more than regal glory. Once again the saying of our Lord shall be fulfilled, and he who seeks first the first things shall find that all other things are added to him.

VIII

THE PREACHER'S PASSION

That most wretched of all possible beings, a popular, unblessed minister.

PRINCIPAL RAINY.

Oh the gravity, the seriousness, the incessant diligence which these things require! I know not what others think of them, but for my part I am ashamed of my stupidity, and wonder at myself that I deal not with my own and others' souls as one that looks for the great day of the Lord; and that I can have room for almost any other thoughts or words, and that such astonishing matters do not wholly absorb my mind. I marvel how I can preach of them slightly and coldly; and how I can let men alone in their sins; and that I do not go to them, and beseech them, for the Lord's sake, to repent, however they take it, and whatever pains or trouble it should cost me! I seldom come out of the pulpit but my conscience smiteth me that I have been no more serious and fervent in such a case. It accuseth me not so much for want of ornaments or elegancy, nor for letting fall an unhandsome word; but it asketh me, 'How couldst thou speak of life and death with such a heart? How couldst thou preach of heaven and hell in such a careless, sleepy manner? Dost thou believe what thou sayest? Art thou in earnest or in jest? Shouldst thou not weep over such a people, and should not thy tears interrupt thy words?' Truly this is the peal that conscience doth ring in my ears. O Lord, do that on our own souls which Thou wouldst use us to do on the souls of others!

RICHARD BAXTER.

CHAPTER VIII

The Preacher's Passion

The closing words of the previous chapter have prepared the way for the subject of this. A style that is clean and clear, terse and strong, gracious and winning, may do much; it may dispose the unwilling to give ear, it may please and attract. And the preacher who remembers his obligation to mind every point, both great and small, will not neglect this. But he has more to do than to please; he has to win. What he seeks from men is not simply their hearing, but their assent. The fitting response to such a message as that of which the preacher is the bearer is not the word of thanks to the messenger, but the surrender of the soul to the Lord. And in seeking that it is not so much literary grace that counts as spiritual passion. In the twentieth century, no less than in the first, the gospel prevails when it comes not in word only but in power. With all his reverent and sometimes idolatrous regard for the intellect, the modern man is rarely moved by preaching of the coldly intellectual type. Arguments wrought in frost convince nobody. A preacher may possess almost every kind of gift, but unless to them all he add that indefinable something, that witchery of heaven which our fathers called 'unction,' his word will

be but as a very lovely song of one that has a pleasant voice and can play well on an instrument. The preaching that prevails is always passionate.

I

It is often said that the pulpit to-day is losing its passion. But statements of this kind, with their implied depreciation of the present in favour of the past, are so often and so easily made that many of us have quite ceased to be impressed by them. They remind one of *Punch's* famous reply to the correspondent who complained that *Punch* was not so good as it used to be. 'It never was,' was the answer. And a very little reading and experience will show us that these lamentations over the pulpit's decaying power are no new thing. For example, this is how Dr. Chalmers wrote in the *North British Review* nearly seventy years ago: 'As things stand at present, our creeds and confessions have become effete, and the Bible a dead letter; and the orthodoxy which was at one time the glory, by withering into the inert and lifeless, is now the shame and reproach of all our Churches.' Shortly after—in 1847—Angell James of Birmingham quoted and endorsed the words in the preface to his book, *An Earnest Ministry the Want of the Times*. And again, twenty-five years later, Dr. Dale, discoursing on 'The Want of Urgency' in modern preaching, felt constrained to admit that the evangelical pulpit was still declining in power.[1] Yet now, in the twentieth century, when, if these mournful estimates had been true, we might have

[1] *The Congregationalist*, July, 1872.

expected to find the evangelical faith and spirit asleep in the grave, they are exerting in the Christian churches of Great Britain and America, and through them on the world, a mightier influence than at any other time in Christian history.

When people complain of the lack of passion in the modern pulpit, do they not often forget with what many and different voices it may speak, and in what many and different forms it may reveal itself? There are some who feel no warmth except when they see showers of sparks. If a preacher is loud in speech and excited in manner, they have no difficulty in believing that he is really in earnest. Intensity of emotion always means for them disruption and explosion, while the quiet self-repression which sometimes marks the deepest feeling they mistake for indifference. To some readers Butler's *Analogy* is the coldest, most passionless book ever penned; I know at least one discerning reader who thinks it one of the most heated books in the English language. To the careless, casual hearer, few preachers must have seemed so wholly without enthusiasm as the late Dr. A. B. Davidson; but what to one seemed but a dull stream of verbal slag, to another glowed like furnace-metal from a fire within the man.[1] There is passion in the rainbow-coloured reverie of Jeremy Taylor, and in the white art of John Henry Newman; in the raging, roaring flame of Whitefield, and in the still, soundless heat of Wesley.

But, while we do well to remember these things, and to protest against judgements which confound

[1] See A. Taylor Innes' 'Biographical Introduction' to Davidson's *Called of God*.

the accidental with the real, or which glorify the past at the expense of the present, we shall do still better if we remind ourselves of the peril which is always with us of letting the passion die out of our preaching. Without entering into any unfair and irritating comparisons with the pulpit of any other day, is it not a fact that the pulpit of to-day is suffering from lack of *abandon*? In Morley's *Life of Gladstone* he characterizes in admirable phrase the style of speech by which, in his great Midlothian campaign, a man of seventy hard-spent years achieved one of the greatest oratorical triumphs of modern political history: 'He bore his hearers through long chains of strenuous periods, calling up by the marvellous transformations of his mien a strange succession of images—as if he were now a keen hunter, now some eager bird of prey, now a charioteer of fiery steeds kept well in hand, and now and again we seemed to hear the pity or dark wrath of a prophet, with the mighty rushing wind and the fire running along the ground.'[1] Is it too much to say that British speakers, whether in the pulpit or on the platform, are afraid to let themselves go in that fashion to-day? We are grown too quiet, too tame, too subdued. We are adopting a style and manner of speech so severely chastened and held in check that, quite unjustly to ourselves, we convey the impression that what we are saying does not greatly matter. In some cases we are sacrificing to mere literary primness and prettiness; in others, to an undue and mistaken self-restraint. It is not that we are not in earnest, but we seem to be afraid of letting it appear that we

[1] Vol. ii., p. 593.

are. Our preaching is too dry-eyed; there is no red blood visible under the skin. If some sympathetic and intelligent hearer in our pews would honestly open his mind to us, it is probably of this he would speak. He would not charge us with not preaching Christ, nor would he complain that we deal so largely in commonplace; if he were the intelligent man I am supposing, he would know that commonplace is the very stuff of the preacher's message. The trouble is, he would say, the commonplace is not vitalized; the thin wire of words is charged with no current that quickens and thrills.

And even when we are in earnest and our earnestness is manifest to all, for what is it that we are earnest? Is it for men whom we have to win and to save, or is it rather for the truth which we are eager to expound and defend? On this point I cannot do better than quote the words of Dr. Dale in the article to which I have already referred: 'In our times there is often intense earnestness in trying to make clear and plain what our Lord meant to teach in His discourses, and what the Apostles meant to teach in their epistles. Men are nervously anxious to make sure that their apprehension of the meaning of the New Testament is accurate and just, and to convey what they believe to be its message to their hearers. They have a kind of rapture in the visions that come to them occasionally of lofty and glorious forms of truth which are remote from the common thought of the Church, and they are eager to share their rapture with their people. Or they are oppressed and dismayed by their sense of the perils which menace

the great articles of the Church's Creed—the Incarnation, the Atonement, the necessity of Regeneration—and are moved to the very depths of their souls while they endeavour by elaborate argument and vehement appeal to sustain the faith of their congregations in these central truths. But their earnestness, even when at white heat, is earnestness about the Truth, not about Men. It is for the Truth, not for Men, that they are alarmed. It is for the defence of the Faith that they are so passionately concerned, not for the salvation of their people. Their hearers are often perplexed by the vehemence of their excitement and by what seems the superfluous energy of their logic in the maintenance and illustration of a great spiritual principle or law. Sometimes, indeed, the earnestness of the preacher may become contagious, but very often it is a mere spectacle on which the congregation gazes without any moral interest. If the hearers felt that the preacher's earnestness was about *themselves*, and not merely about what he believes to be the truth, the impression would be altogether different.'[1]

II

Is it possible to put our finger on any forces and

[1] These words were written in 1872. Nearly twenty years later, Dale passed a similar judgement on his own ministry: 'I have been thinking much and with much concern about my preaching. It has a fatal defect. It is wanting in an element which is indispensable to real success. I do not think that I should state the exact truth if I said that I was not anxious for the conversion and perfection of individual men, and cared only for setting forth the truth. But I fear that the truth occupies too large a place in my thought, and that I have been too much occupied with the instrument—the divine instrument—for effecting the ends of the ministry, too little with the actual persons to be restored to God.' (*Life*, p. 590.)

tendencies in the thought and life of the Church to-day which chill the ardour of the preacher's passion?

There are those who tell us quite confidently that the old ardour is gone because the old theology is gone, and that we shall never get back the one until we get back the other. Our altered ways of thinking about God and the Bible and the future, it is said, have weakened the right arm of the evangelist and blunted the keen edge of his sword. We know what the leaders of the Evangelical Revival believed, and with what amazing results they pressed home their appeal on the hearts and consciences of men. Let us recover their faith, and we shall recover their power. When people speak in this way they have not frequently any very exact idea of the nature of the theological changes to which they refer. They are dimly conscious that things are not just what they were; but how far the change is in the substance of our faith, and how far it is only in its intellectual form, they do not pause to inquire; nor, perhaps, if they did would they be able to determine. Probably, if they were pressed for a definition, we should discover that they are thinking mainly of our changed attitude toward the Scriptures and the future of the impenitent.

If this be a correct reading of the facts, we are in a bad way indeed. To say that the full recovery of spiritual passion in the pulpit depends on our getting back to the doctrinal formulas of the eighteenth century, with its impossible theories of Scripture and its unscriptural theories of the future, is only a needlessly roundabout way of saying

that it can never be recovered at all. You can no more put back the theological clock than you can the scientific, and the eighteenth-century point of view is as impossible to us as the pre-Copernican to the astronomer. Forms of belief which were fuel for the fire of the preacher's passion a century or a century and a half ago would put out rather than feed our fire to-day. Nor is it only the pulpit that has changed; the pew has changed likewise. Even if the old appeal were made, it would not evoke the old response. A speaker's power depends not only on his own convictions, but on the mental prepossessions of his hearers; and if these move in a wholly different plane, if he cannot somehow find some point of attachment with them, his most urgent appeals will fall at his feet wingless and dead. The truth is, of course, the whole diagnosis is at fault.

It was not the passing intellectual forms in which the faith of our fathers found expression that gave them their strength; nor is it our rejection of these forms that accounts for our weakness. In each case the explanation lies deeper. The divine certainties which are ours in Christ, the sense of infinite obligation to Him—these are the things, and the only things, that make the evangelist, whether in the first century, or the eighteenth, or the twentieth. Given these and they will create their own theology; and whether it be old or new—and it will be partly both—it will be sufficient. Without these, there is nothing else, old or new, that is of the smallest moment, to the evangelist or to anybody else.

They are not less at fault who think the pulpit's

passion is in danger of being quenched by its growing scholarship. The fear of learning dies hard in some minds, and we still have amongst us good people who are suspicious of a college-bred ministry, and in whose eyes a University degree is for a preacher a doubtful boon. Very often, if we take the trouble to inquire, we shall find that fears of this sort have a very definite origin. The persons who cherish them are thinking of some actual example in which, as it seems to them, the eager zeal of youth has been overborne by the larger knowledge of later years. And with them the step from a particular instance to a general conclusion is easily taken. The truth is, however, that no number of instances of this kind can justify the conclusion which they are used to support. Let it be said boldly; no man should enter the ministry who has not reasons for doing so which lie out of the reach of the most searching intellectual questionings. And when perplexities thicken about him, he must find his peace, not by vainly seeking to close his mind to the new knowledge which has created them, but by learning to live at such a depth of spiritual being as they cannot pierce. If he has nothing to say to men that is not at the mercy of science or criticism, then he has nothing to say at all which gives him any right to be a Christian preacher. The work of the Church, it is manifest, can never be done either by fervid ignorance or passionless culture. We must have knowledge and we must have zeal, the well-trained mind and the warmed heart. To discuss which we need more is like discussing which foot we need more, the right or the left; we need both, and without either progress

is at an end. On the one hand we need culture, and there is nothing that a man knows, of the world, of men, of books, that may not be of use to him as a preacher. On the other hand, we need fervour, and all that a man knows will be of no use to him whatever, it will be a mere heap of cold, dead fuel, unless it be fused into a glowing mass in the central fires of his own convictions and experience.

We are much nearer an explanation of the pulpit's lack of passion in our modern suspicion of emotionalism. Once more we must not forget how delusive in this matter are appearances. The real depth of emotion is not to be gauged by its outward manifestations. These will always vary with varying degrees of culture, and with differences of temperament, both national and individual. Set a Presbyterian shepherd from the Lowlands of Scotland in a prayer-meeting of Methodist fishermen in Cornwall, and he will be outraged by what will appear to him little better than a profane burlesque. Reverse the process, and the Cornish Methodist will feel as if he were being choked by the stiff and starched proprieties of the Presbyterian meeting-house. Yet, if the question be asked to which man religion is the more tremendous and ever present reality, many who know both will not hesitate to give their vote for the Lowland shepherd. Nevertheless, with multitudes to-day the emotional life is not getting fair play; we are guilty of a wanton suppression of its natural and proper manifestations; we are deliberately starving one whole side of our nature; and the cold-blooded pedantry which affects to look down on all religious excitement as vulgar rant is being suffered to inflict the gravest

injury upon the whole life and work of the Church, and not least upon the life and work of the preacher.

There are some very significant words in one of the *Early Letters* of Marcus Dods: '—— wants me to change my whole style of preaching; but I see plainly enough that if I am to succeed I must use what would be, in me at least, clap-trap; and I won't. I will never say "Oh!" unless my *normal* state of feeling is at that height.'[1] And of course he was right. But is there not an insincerity of repression as well as of expression? By all means let us be ourselves, in the pulpit or out of it, but for Heaven's sake let us not pinch and squeeze ourselves to fit the foolish fancy of the religious modistes who would tie us all up in hobble skirts and frown down noise and fervour in the pulpit as 'bad form.' Young preachers, who are being deluded into the belief that to be effective is to be quiet and to hold yourself in, should read what one of his most brilliant students has written of the late Principal Rainy: 'His is the subtlest mind of our time with which I ever came in contact; possibly, because it was so subtle, and his manner was so perfectly cleansed from enthusiasm, students of weaker capacity did not receive the full benefit of his instruction.'[2] This, be it said, is no reflection on Rainy, for Rainy's manner was Rainy's self. But never let the preacher make the mistake of trying to hide his own fire. After all, nothing is so 'catching' as an honest enthusiasm, and, other things being equal, it is the man who is himself greatly moved, and is not ashamed to let it be seen, who will greatly move

[1] p. 247.

[2] Sir W. Robertson Nicoll's *Ian Maclaren*, p. 58.

others. Therefore, if a preacher has received from God a rich, strong, emotional nature, let him give no heed to the silly chatter of those who tell him that he has no right to work on men's feelings—as if religion could do anything for a man whose feelings are not worked on!—let him give it full play, and he will find it mighty to the opening of many doors against which his most powerful logic will beat itself in vain.

More than to any other single cause, however, the preacher's lack of passion to-day is probably due to the multiplying of his activities and the consequent dissipation of his strength. In saying this I am not unmindful of the few to whom apparently it does not apply. We still have among us giants who can spend themselves with lavish strength on many things, and do them all superlatively well. I am thinking now, as always in these pages, of the many with their lesser gifts. And for them the law of self-limitation is the first law of life; they can do much only on condition that they do not attempt to do many things. In one of Dean Church's *Occasional Papers* there is a very striking judgement on the life and work of St. Bernard of Clairvaux: 'As the prophet and enlightener of his age, Bernard would have been greater and more complete if he had not been the preacher of the Crusade and the vanquisher of Abelard, or even the stern satirist and reformer of the corruptions and abuses of his distinguished pupil's Court at Rome. He was meant for the privacy and quiet of a life of thought and all that such a life creates. He added to it the dazzling glory of a life of brilliant practical achievement. . . .

He is a warning to all Christian explorers and expounders of truth—a warning all the more emphatic for the singular disinterestedness of his purpose, and the success of much that he attempted—not to be tempted by the influence which their work in retirement has given them, into those entangling and difficult paths of public activity from which, when once a man has entered on them, it is hard to draw back, and in which it is so easy for the thinker, the divine, the teacher, to pass into the religious partisan, the religious manager and meddler and contriver, forgetting at once, in the purity and elevation of his purpose, and in the intoxication of success, the inherent snares and dangers of power in any human hands.'[1] How far this is a just judgement on St. Bernard it is not for me to say, but it indicates with prophetic insight what many must feel to be one of the gravest perils of the modern preacher.

One of the shrewdest, and withal one of the kindliest, of my ministerial friends told me a little time ago of the disappointment with which, during a few weeks' holiday, he had listened to a number of preachers. Their sermons, he said, lacked reality and grip; they were tame and ineffective. 'What is the explanation?' I asked; 'is it the vulgar vice of laziness?' 'No,' he said, 'it is the more vulgar vice of busy-ness.'[2] And his words, I am convinced, came far nearer to the heart of the matter than mine. There are still lazy ministers, no doubt; but the changed conditions of the

[1] Vol. i., p. 237.

[2] The friend to whom I refer (who is also the 'discerning reader' of p. 221) is the Rev. Arthur Hoyle. He will forgive, I hope, the liberty I take in quoting a conversation which he perhaps has forgotten.

Church's work, the tightening of the Church's own demands upon those who serve it, the growing swiftness and sureness with which the sins of the ministerial trifler find him out, are all tending to make the Christian ministry to-day, what indeed it ought always to be, a bed of thorns for the man who will not work. And now a peril faces us from the directly opposite quarter—the peril not of laziness but of busy-ness. *Take heed to thyself*, said the old Deuteronomic law, *that thou offer not thy burnt offerings in every place thou seest*; that is to say —I quote Mark Rutherford's unforgettable comment —'reserve yourself, discriminate, do not squander yourself, keep your worship for the Highest.'[1] This is what we are forgetting. Instead of taking our life into our own hands, and laying it out as we best know how, we suffer any well-meaning busy-body, with a glib tongue or a good cause, to cut and carve it as he will, until, what with calls and committees and conventions, only the fragments of our days are left to us in which to read and think and keep our souls alive. When a man's study has become an office, and the minister himself, as that detestable American phrase has it, the man that 'runs the church,' let no one wonder at what comes to pass. We cannot have it both ways; and bustle all the week, as some one has well said, means baldness all the Sunday. The stream which, while it flows within its appointed channels, may minister in a hundred ways to human happiness and well-being, when it bursts its banks

[1] From the Rev. Thomas Bradshaw's sermon in *The Revolution in Tanner's Lane*, p. 394. It is said, with what truth I know not, that the original of Bradshaw is the famous Dr. Thomas Binney.

and spreads itself abroad, creates but a watery waste.

Paul, a servant of Jesus Christ, called to be an apostle, separated unto the gospel of God—separated unto the gospel of God—separated : the word squares ill with some of our modern ideals of the ministry. It suggests aloofness, restriction, the snapping of ties that bind us to life, the calling home of the soul's forces within itself ; and these are not now, with most of us, things to be sought for. It is here, we think, we blundered in the past. The preacher touched life at too few points ; his study, his pulpit, his people—these were all his care ; in the big world's life he played no part. But not on such terms is our work to be done to-day. There is no salvation in separation ; redemption must come from within ; and therefore, to save the world, we must enter into it and take possession of it. And so our modern type of minister is an organizer, a man of affairs, something perhaps of a politician, and very much of a social reformer—

> A man so various that he seems to be
> Not one, but all mankind's epitome.

If, like Bishop Westcott, he can add to our knowledge of the Greek Testament, well ; but if, like the same Bishop, he can settle a great coal strike, then verily the kingdom of heaven is come nigh unto us. Not apart, on ' the fringy edges of the fight,' but amid ' the pell-mell of men,' there surely is the place where the apostle of Christ should wish to be. They who tell us these things are not wrong ; the thing that is in their hearts is right and true ; but it is not the whole truth, nor is it the truth for

every man. Strikes have to be settled, and social wrongs to be righted, and to do these things is the work of Christian men, and sometimes it may be of Christian ministers. But let every man be fully persuaded in his own mind. Let him refuse to be hustled into tasks which he knows are not his. Let him not be ashamed to confess that for him duty lies in the quiet routine of his appointed work. Let him discriminate, and reserve himself; and if not to-day nor to-morrow, the day after to-morrow he shall have his reward. In the long run we do our best work when we do our own work; and, little as we sometimes realize it, it is our own work well done, not our amateurish excursions into other men's fields, that really counts in the sum of human service.[1]

III

To whatever extent the facts just alluded to are responsible for the weakening of the preacher's

[1] Something might be added concerning temptations of a grosser sort, which sometimes turn away the preacher from the main business of his life. In Canada, for example, where these pages are being written, the pull of the material magnet is a very grave menace to ministerial efficiency. A young man is sent out by his church to the West. Living is dear, and his salary small. All around him he sees men, with perhaps much smaller gifts than his own, making wealth and making it fast. Why should he not share in the golden opportunity? A few dollars wisely invested, a rapid rise in values, a timely sale: it is all so simple; everybody about him is doing it, and doing it every day; why may not he? Well, I am not discussing the ethics of speculation; I am not questioning any man's right to purchase land, and then, when the opportunity offers, to sell out at a large profit; all I have to say is this—and those who know may illustrate for themselves—no man can think 'real estate' six days in the week and then be a prophet on the seventh. Yet it is the prophet, the man of steady vision and fearless speech, whom the West needs, without whom it must perish. Now the prophets of to-day are not slain, but sometimes, alas! they are silenced. If they are to be free they must be separate: *separated unto the gospel of God.*

passion—and of course doctors will differ in this as in other things—we shall all agree that spiritual passion is an essential element in all true preaching. It must be not merely touched but drenched by it. Preachers sometimes resent, and not without reason, the prejudice that some people have against what they call 'intellectual' sermons. But the truth is, when people speak thus they do not mean quite what they say; their complaint is not because the sermons have too much thought, but because they have too little warmth; they are repelled, not by their intellectual strength, but by their intellectual coldness. And, after all, it matters little how excellent the fuel if the fire be out. All that a man has of intellectual strength, to its last ounce, he can put into the work of preaching; but intellect alone can never make a preacher, and the man with no more heart than can be made out of brains is in his wrong place in the pulpit. Dr. Chalmers once compared the sermons of the Moderates to a fine winter's day: they were short, clear, and cold. The brevity is good, and the clearness better, but the coldness is fatal. Moonlight preaching ripens no harvests.

To the Hebrew prophets, it has been finely said, 'preaching was no mere display, but a sore battle with the hard hearts of their contemporaries.'[1] And the young preacher who will take the trouble to go over the great names in the history of the Christian pulpit will soon discover that this passion to win men is the ultimate fountain of all preaching that is of the prophetic order. Thus, for example,

[1] George Adam Smith's *Modern Criticism and the Preaching of the Old Testament*, p. 281.

in Great Britain during the seventeenth century there were four great preachers living and working side by side: Samuel Rutherford, Joseph Alleine, John Bunyan, and Richard Baxter. They were men of widely varied gifts and attainments, but in the ministry of each the same high note of spiritual passion is heard. 'Many a time I thought,' writes a contemporary of Rutherford, 'he would have flown out of the pulpit when he came to speak of Jesus Christ.'[1] 'Infinitely and insatiably greedy of the conversion of souls,' Alleine preached his gospel 'with shouting voice, flashing eye, and a soul on fire with love.'[2] 'In my preaching,' says Bunyan, 'I have really been in pain, and have, as it were, travailed to bring forth children to God; neither could I be satisfied unless some fruits did appear in my work.'[3] And as Baxter stepped into his Kidderminster pulpit, this, he says, was the peal which conscience rang in his ears: 'Dost thou believe what thou sayest? Art thou in earnest or in jest? Shouldest thou not weep over such a people, and should not thy tears interrupt thy words?'[4]

But the preacher's great example in this, as in so many other things, is St. Paul. And, indeed, there is in the vehemence of the Apostle's passion something that thrills and awes us, so unlike is it to anything that our own tepid, commonplace experience knows. Some one has pointed out the striking contrast between the dominant interest with which St. Paul says *I must see Rome*, and that

[1] See A. Taylor Innes' *Studies in Scottish History*, p. 34.
[2] C. Stanford's *Joseph Alleine*, pp. 140, 143.
[3] *Grace Abounding*, par. 290.
[4] *The Reformed Pastor*.

which the words would ordinarily reveal. The Apostle was eager to visit the Imperial City only because he was eager to preach there also the gospel of Christ. Every other ambition of his life had passed into this. All the waters of his soul had gathered themselves into one mighty flood to be poured through the narrows of this single purpose: *To preach unto the Gentiles the unsearchable riches of Christ.* When Silas and Timothy came down from Macedonia, Paul, we read, *was constrained by the word*, or, as Sir W. M. Ramsay renders it, *was wholly absorbed in preaching.*[1] The urgency of his message burned like a fire in his bones; his passion to win men was a divine constraint which gave him no rest. *By the space of three years*, he told the Ephesian elders, *I ceased not to admonish every one night and day with tears.* When his friends, foreseeing danger and death, besought him not to go up to Jerusalem, he put them from him, saying, *What do ye, weeping and breaking my heart? for I am ready not to be bound only, but also to die at Jerusalem for the name of the Lord Jesus. For my brethren's sake*, he cried, *I could wish that I myself were anathema from Christ.*

> Oh to save these! to perish for their saving,
> Die for their life, be offered for them all!

A passion like this is a spark from the altar-fire of Christ's own love; it is the ordination, not with hands, to the office and work of the holy ministry.[2]

[1] *St. Paul, the Traveller and Roman Citizen*, p. 253. 'They found Paul wholly occupied with the word,' is Mr. T. E. Page's translation (*Acts of the Apostles*, p. 199).

[2] A few sentences in this paragraph and in the last paragraph of this chapter are taken from the writer's *Memoranda Paulina*.

And here, it may be said in passing, is the answer to the question which is sometimes discussed among ministers concerning the preaching of old sermons. An old sermon may be repeated just so long as it is possible, in the preaching of it, to recover the heat in which it was first made. But if, however true and vital it may once have been, the preacher's own soul is no longer kindled by it, if the fire is gone out of it and it is now but a poor dead cinder, then let it be put straightway in the place of cinders. What the pew is concerned to know is not so much whether a sermon is new or old, as whether it is living. If it is living, and as long as it is living, it will create life and minister to it; when it is dead it should go the way of all dead things. *Your memorable sayings*, said Job to his friends, *are proverbs of ashes.* And that, alas, is what the preacher sometimes takes into his pulpit for a sermon —the ashes, cold and grey, of what was once a fire. What he says is faultless enough, and simple folk sometimes wonder why the fluent, well-turned sentences leave them so strangely cold. The truth is that what once were glowing convictions at which men warmed their hands are to-day but a heap of ashes from which the last glint of fire has long since died out. That is the tragedy of more pulpits than one cares to think of.

IV

If, then, passion is so essential an element in all preaching that is to move and win men, by what

means may we guard and feed the sacred fire? The question has been answered, in part at least, and by implication, in what has already been said; but the matter is of such vital importance that a few further words may be added.

In Mrs. Oliphant's *Life of Principal Tulloch*, there is a very vivid record of the impression produced by a sermon of Spurgeon's on Tulloch and his travelling companion, Professor Ferrier, the Scottish metaphysician: 'We have just been to hear Spurgeon,' he writes, 'and have been both so much impressed that I wish to give you my impressions while they are fresh. As we came out we both confessed, "there is no doubt about *that*," and I was struck with Ferrier's remarkable expression, "I feel it would do me good to hear the like of that, it sat so close to reality." The sermon is about the most real thing I have come in contact with for a long time.'[1] It was so, too, that Newman impressed his contemporaries: he preached so that he made you feel without doubt that the spiritual was the most real of worlds to him; he made you feel in time, in spite of yourself, that it was a real world with which you too had concern.[2] And to nothing, perhaps, is a congregation to-day more sensitive, nothing does it detect more quickly, than the difference between reality and unreality. When Ian Maclaren began his ministry, his biographer remarks, people knew what to expect, and the minister said what was to be expected. But as time went on the atmospheric conditions changed, and now a minister

[1] p. 132.

[2] See Dean Church's *Occasional Papers*, vol. ii., p. 445.

must find truths which hold him if he is to hold the people.[1]

At whatever cost the preacher must be real. If we are dull, if we are cold, if we are powerless—pulpit Mephibosheths, lame on both our feet—it is our unreality that is our undoing. Let a man but have real dealings with God, and though his speech be faltering and his syntax shaky, he will always have power with men. It was an ancient superstition of the hunter that the bullet will hit its mark which is first dipped in the huntsman's blood. And the preaching that prevails has always on it the red stain of an original experience. As Faust puts it,

> Ne'er from heart to heart you'll speak inspiring,
> Save your own heart is eloquent.

It were better, as I have said before,[2] to move within a narrower range of subjects which experience has made real to us than to wander over wide fields which we have not yet made our own. This was John Bunyan's way: 'I preached,' he says, 'what I felt, what I smartingly did feel, even that under which my poor soul did groan and tremble to astonishment.' 'The Lord did lead me to begin where His word begins with sinners. . . . Now this part of my work I fulfilled with great sense,[3] for the terrors of the law, and guilt for my transgressions lay heavy on my conscience. . . . I went myself in chains to preach to them in chains; and I carried that fire in my own conscience that I

[1] p. 101.
[2] See p. 75
[3] i.e., with great feeling, sympathy.

persuaded them to beware of. . . . Thus I went for the space of two years, crying out against men's sins, and their fearful state because of them. After which the Lord came in upon my own soul with some staid peace and comfort through Christ; for He did give me many sweet discoveries of His blessed grace through Him. Wherefore now I altered in my preaching (for still I preached what I saw and felt); now therefore I did much labour to hold forth Christ in all His offices, relations, and benefits unto the world. . . . After this, God led me into something of the mystery of the union with Christ. Wherefore that I discovered and showed to them also.'[1] If only we all had John Bunyan's courage! To preach what we feel, what we smartingly do feel, and to preach only that, would be as the kindling of fire in many a cold, dead pulpit. Reality is always passionate.

Should not the preacher also be able to look to his own experiences with the word for a steady reinforcement of the conviction with which he proclaims it? Any faith that a man holds is doubly his when he has made a convert to it. But when we go on preaching week after week, and nothing seems to come of it all, is it any wonder that faith in the message begins to flag? It means much to us intelligently to realize that what St. Paul calls *the word of the truth of the gospel* is *in all the world bearing fruit and increasing*; but it means a hundredfold more when we can watch the harvest springing under our own hand, when we can add concerning those to whom we have ministered,

[1] *Grace Abounding*, pars. 276-9.

as it doth in you also, since the day ye heard and knew the grace of God in truth. It is a man's own victories, won at the point of the sword which is the word of the Lord, that make him say, like David, *There is none like it; give it me.*

In F. W. H. Myers' striking poem, *St. Paul*, there are several stanzas concerning Damaris, the woman of whom it is written that, with certain others at Athens, she *clave unto Paul* and *believed*. For various reasons it has been suggested that Damaris may have belonged to that unhappy class of women who were the shame and reproach of the great cities of the ancient world as they are still of the modern.[1] And upon this conjecture Myers rests this section of his poem. He shows us a woman not unvisited in her fall by dreams of better things. She would clamber to the temple of the gods, but only to find an idol that

> Heard not, nor pitied her, nor made reply;

then she turned to Nature in its beauty, 'the purple heather,' and 'the purple sea.' But Nature could not fill the heart's void. Nature could not save. And so, 'with set face and with smiling bitter,' she turns back once more to the old life of sin to find, if so she may, what will help her to forget. But in Athens it chanced she heard one Paul, who *preached* unto her *Jesus and the resurrection*. And what neither the gods nor Nature could tell her, she learned at the feet of this stranger. And *certain believed, among whom was . . . a woman named Damaris*. This was what Paul's coming to Athens

[1] See Conybeare and Howson's *Life and Epistles of St. Paul*, chap. x.; Ramsay's *St. Paul, the Traveller and the Roman Citizen*, p. 252.

meant for her ; and this is the poet's interpretation of what it meant for the Apostle :

> Then I preached Christ, and when she heard the story—
> Oh, is such triumph possible to men ?
> Hardly, my King, had I beheld Thy glory,
> Hardly had known Thine excellence till then.

It is always so ; the faith of the apostle is born anew in the faith of the disciple whom he has won ; in the strength of that victory he can go many days and not faint.

And, finally, for the renewing of passion's wasting strength we need the continued renewing of our sense of the greatness and wonder of the Christian gospel. A man's first fresh study of the New Testament, writes Marcus Dods in one of his *Early Letters*, does him great good ; but, he adds, ' how soon do we cease to see the wonders in it.'[1] The pity of it, the pity of it ! ' Things,' as John Howe says, ' that should swallow up our souls, drink up our spirits ' so often become to us but as a tale that is told. And yet the men who move us, the men through whom religion is made real to us, are they not always men within whose hearts the first freshness of the wonder of the gospel is being daily renewed ? Those who had the privilege of knowing the late Principal Rainy will remember how often in his later years this thought was upon his lips. He never wearied to dwell on the wonder of the Christian revelation. ' Too often,' he said, ' we preach and believe every word even of it, and are pleased with what we say—too well, perhaps—

[1] p. 329.

but we are not astonished at it in our own minds.' 'The longer I live,' he wrote in one of his last letters, 'the more wonderful does the forgiveness of sins seem to me.'[1] The same note is heard in the lives of the leaders of the Oxford movement. However we may judge them in other matters, they were men who had learned to tremble at God's word; and as the dyer's hand is subdued to what it works in, so were they made great by the greatness of the gospel which they had made their own. And again the same is true of men who lived in another zone and spoke another dialect—the leaders of the Evangelical Revival. The wonder of redemption lay upon their hearts like a spell. This is the note alike of their preaching and of their hymns:

> And can it be that I should gain
> An interest in the Saviour's blood?
> Died He for me, who caused His pain?
> For me who Him to death pursued?
> Amazing love! how can it be
> That Thou, my God, should'st die for me?

And this, too, is the mind of St. Paul. *What*, he asks, *shall we say to these things*? He can never be done wondering at what is involved in the gospel of Christ. That it should have pleased God to reveal His Son in him, and to send him to preach among the Gentiles the unsearchable riches of Christ, that it should be the will of God *to make all men see what is the dispensation of the mystery which from all ages hath been hid in God who created all things*, were thoughts that never ceased to fill his mind with a great and glad surprise. To him the

[1] P. C. Simpson's *Life*, vol. ii., pp. 256, 490.

gospel was simply the most wonderful thing in the world. The amazing love, the infinite condescension revealed in the Cross, hushed and awed his spirit. That any man should reject the revelation filled him with astonishment, but that any man could receive it as a mere matter of course would have been to him a thing unthinkable. And it may be the full recovery of the apostolic passion will come only with a recovery of the apostolic sense of awe in the presence of the tremendous realities of the Christian revelation.

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